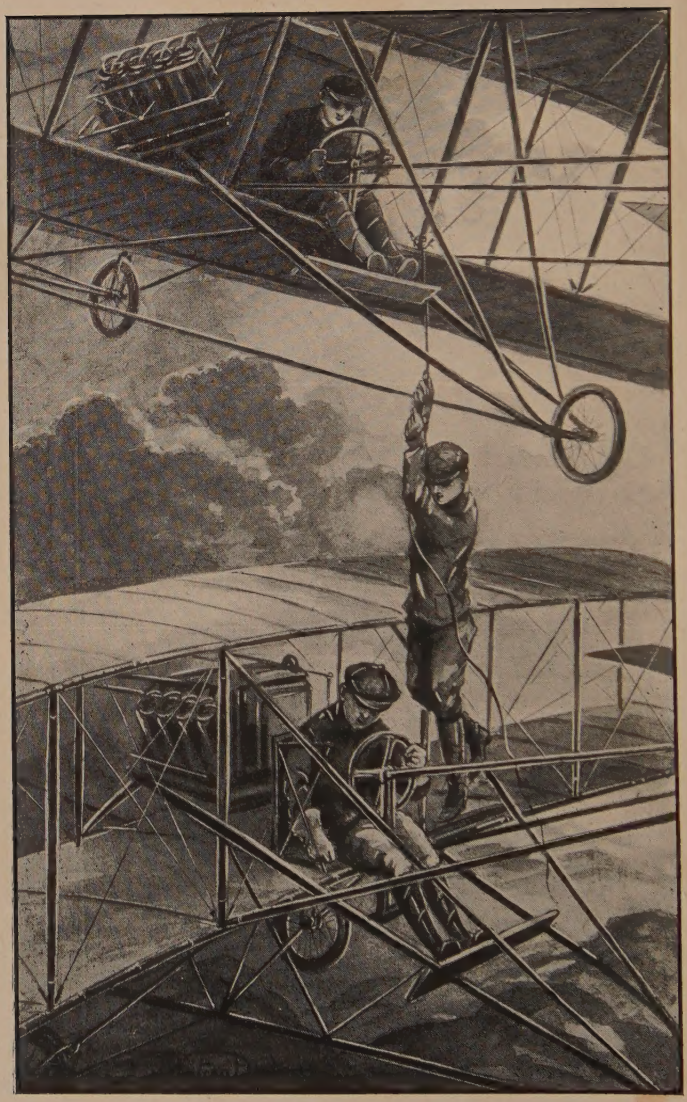
The FLYING MACHINE BOYS ON SECRET SERVICE

BY FRANK WALTON

Do not turn
down Pages
this means you

Billy WE152



Jimmie felt his body brushing against the framework of the Ann's top wing as he lowered himself from the Louise.

The Flying Machine Boys on Secret Service

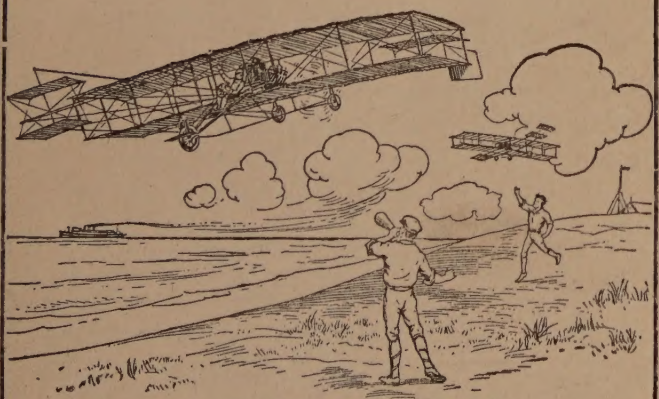
OR

The Capture in the Air

By FRANK WALTON

AUTHOR OF

"The Flying Machine Boys in the Wilds"
"The Flying Machine Boys on Duty"
"The Flying Machine Boys in Mexico"



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THE FLYING MACHINE BOYS ON SECRET SERVICE

THE FLYING MACHINE BOYS ON SECRET SERVICE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FALL OF THE BEAR.

Two aeroplanes lay in a green basin in the heart of the Rocky mountains. To the east of the basin lay a slope of half a mile or more. At the top of the slope stretched a summit not more than half an acre in extent. Thirty miles away lifted the snowy peaks of the Continental Divide. To the west a broken country stretched to the Pacific.

The flying machines lying in the valley were the *Louise* and the *Bertha.* They had arrived from New York city that day, and the aviators, weary from their long journey, were lying about a great fire of dry jack pines and spruce. Thick porterhouse steaks, brought in from Spokane, were broiling over a nest of coals, and a great coffee-pot was sending forth its fragrance on the evening air.

Those who have read the previous books of

this series will scarcely need an introduction to Ben Whitcomb, Jimmie Stuart, or Carl Nichols. Sturdy, adventurous lads of seventeen, they had entered the employ of Louis Havens, the noted millionaire aviator, a few months before, and under his direction had visited the mountains of Mexico, Southern California and Peru. While on their Peruvian trip they had assisted greatly in the capture of a cashier who had stolen several million dollars from a New York trust company. This incident had led to their visit to British Columbia.

On the very night of their return from Peru, Mr. Havens had suggested that they enter the service of the federal government and assist in the capture of a group of mail-order outlaws who were believed to have caused the abduction of a post-office inspector who had long been investigating their peculiar methods of doing business.

Although Mr. Havens had not at that time given the boys the full details of the case, they had at once joyfully accepted the mission and almost immediately taken their departure for the Pacific coast.

It was believed at the time of their departure that the inspector who had been abducted had been taken to the mountains of British Columbia for safekeeping. Just how this information had reached the secret service department no one outside of the private office of the chief knew.

All the papers collected by the inspector, many of

them of great importance as supplying convincing proof against the fraudulent mail-order operators, had been removed from the inspector's office at the time of his abduction. The documents, of course, could not be replaced.

The boys had traveled directly from New York to a point in the Rocky mountains not far north of Crow's Nest, where they had crossed the great range. So far as practicable they had traveled nights and at a low altitude.

Naturally the passage of two large flying machines over the country had attracted attention, but the boys had kept away from cities so far as possible, and it was believed that no one connected with the group of mail-order operators had any intimation of the purpose of the trip.

For a portion of the distance the boys had been accompanied on the trip by Mr. Havens, riding the *Ann,* probably the largest and fastest aeroplane ever constructed. The millionaire aviator, however, had halted at Denver for the purpose of receiving definite instructions from the secret service department at Washington, while the boys had proceeded on their way. His arrival was momentarily expected.

While the steak broiled and the coffee bubbled the three boys sat looking over the great slope above. They spoke little for a time. The scene was so grand, so near to the very heart of nature, that all the little things of life seemed inconsequential. For

a space they forgot the mighty skyscrapers and canyons of New York and the level prairies over which they had journeyed. The mountain scene dominated everything in their minds.

Presently Ben Whitcomb, brown-eyed, athletic, and rather inclined at times to take little troubles to heart, sprang to his feet and pointed to the north. The others were at his side in a moment.

"Look there!" he said passing a field glass to Jimmie.

Jimmie, red-headed, freckle-faced and shorter in stature than his companion, looked through the glass for a moment and passed it on to Carl.

"Is that an elk?" Jimmie asked in a moment.

"That's what it is!" answered Ben. "It's a full-grown bull elk!"

Carl, blue-eyed, broad of shoulders, and always ready to meet an emergency with a joke, handed the glass back to Ben and hastened to the broiling steaks.

Somewhat farther up on the slope of the basin where the green timber halted, crowded down by the rock, an elk walked out into the middle of an especially inviting patch of grass and looked about. He carried a good pair of antlers and looked big and beautiful. For about five minutes he grazed on the tender grass then marched to the edge of the basin and browsed on green branches. Finally he

vanished in the thick green timber, and was not seen again.

"Cripes!" exclaimed Jimmie. "Wouldn't that be a sight for the great White Way? He'd look fine down at Forty-second street, wouldn't he?"

"Huh!" answered Carl. "I guess there's Elks enough on Broadway now!"

"More than there are in all these mountains," Ben suggested.

Directly Ben took the steak and coffee from the fire and Jimmie and Carl brought dishes and knives and forks from the flying machines. Then they spread a white table cloth on the turf not far from the fire and laid out their meal. Besides the meat and coffee there was plenty of bread, canned beans and tomatoes.

"I'm going hunting to-morrow!" Jimmie declared. "I'd like to know what's the use of paying fifty dollars apiece for a hunting license and then bringing beefsteak in from Spokane."

Ben took out one of the non-resident hunting licenses and read it over carefully.

"This gives me a right," he said, "to slay three mountain goats; three mountain sheep rams; three deer; one bull moose, and all the grizzly bears I can come up with."

"Are they all good to eat?" demanded Carl.

"They're all good to eat in a way," replied Ben, "but I don't think the people hereabouts feast very

much on mountain sheep, or grizzly bears either, when they can get anything else."

"We ate bear in southern California!" cried Jimmie.

"Yes, and it was all right, too!" Carl declared.

"What's the matter of going out hunting to-night?" Jimmie asked in a moment. "Then we'll be sure to have something for breakfast."

"I think we'd better remain in camp to-night," Ben replied. "We'll put up our oiled silk shelter-tents, and get the blankets and pillows out of the flying machines, and make ourselves comfortable right here until Mr. Havens comes. He may not be here for two or three days."

"But he said he wouldn't be ten hours behind us!" argued Carl.

"When a man's doing business by wire with the secret service department at Washington," Ben explained, "he doesn't know whether he'll be ten hours or ten days finding out what he wants to know!"

"Why didn't he find out before he left New York?" asked Jimmie.

"He did find out all they knew regarding the whereabouts of post-office inspector Larry Colleton before we left New York!" answered Ben. "He stopped at Denver to find out if anything new had developed."

"Are you sure this is the basin he told us to camp in?" asked Carl.

"Certain sure!" answered Ben. "He told us to cross the divide at the Crow's Nest and keep on north between the Elk river and the mountains until we came to a large grassy valley."

"Then this is the place all right!" Carl agreed.

After supper, the boys set up their shelter-tents and prepared to pass a comfortable night. They had spent nearly two weeks crossing the continent, and had been in the air most of the nights, so they looked forward to a long sleep with pleasant anticipations.

While the boys were putting the finishing touches on the bed in one of the shelter-tents, a great rattling of stones was heard and in a moment rubble from the size of a marble to that of an apple came rattling down the long slope to the east. Startled by the unexpected shower, which pelted about the camp like hailstones in a northern blizzard, the lads rushed from the tent to ascertain the cause of the sudden commotion.

Twenty rods up the mountain they saw what appeared to be the body of a great grizzly bear half-sliding, half-tumbling toward the valley. At times the lumbering animal retarded his fall by clinging with his claws to the uncertain slope. Again, he rolled over and over for several yards, until his claws secured another hold. The beast was uttering

savage growls as he came down, and every bump he received appeared to bring forth snarls more vicious than those which had gone before.

"Cripes!" exclaimed Jimmie. "Look who's here!"

"He'll be here in a minute, plumb on top of the tent!" Carl declared.

"Then why don't you do something to head him off?" asked Jimmie.

"Yes," the other argued, "I'd like to get in front of a ton of bear meat coming down a mountain at the rate of forty miles an hour!"

It was fortunate for the boys that the descent of the bear was checked for a little by a narrow shelf which ran along the edge of the slope close to the bottom. Here the great body landed with a thud which knocked out what little breath remained.

"That saved our tents and flying machines, I reckon!" cried Ben, as the bear tipped from the shelf and landed in the grass only a few feet from the *Louise*.

"He certainly would have smashed something if he had gone on at the clip he was going when we first saw him!" agreed Carl.

"Speaking about going hunting to-night or to-morrow!" laughed Ben, "it strikes me that we don't have to go hunting in this philanthropic country. Fresh meat seems to rain down from the skies!"

The three boys now advanced to the side of the animal and looked him over. He was not quite dead, but it was evident that he had received injuries from which he could not recover.

"We may as well put him out of his trouble," suggested Ben, drawing an automatic revolver. "He made a fight for life and lost!"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Jimmie, standing now at the bear's head, "here's a fresh bullet wound now!"

"Do you suppose that's what made him fall?" asked Ben.

"Of course!" returned Jimmie. "He was up on the mountain and some one shot him, and that's why he came tumbling down in that ridiculous way."

"Is the wound still bleeding?" asked Carl.

"Still bleeding!" replied Jimmie. "It looks like a wound about five minutes' old. The bullet is somewhere inside the grizzly's head, and I don't believe he was in his right mind when he was sticking his claws into the rocks on the way down!"

The three boys looked at each other with questioning glances.

"Ask it!" grinned Jimmie.

"Ask it yourself!" Carl exclaimed.

"I'll ask it!" Ben said with a grave face. "Who fired that shot?"

"The answer is 'Yes', so far as I know!" laughed Jimmie.

"No foolishness now!" Ben continued. "Some one fired that shot, and that means that some one is prowling around our camp!"

"The man who fired the shot," suggested Carl, "may be over on the other side of the mountain!"

"Then he'd be more than half a mile away!" scoffed Jimmie.

"That's a fact!" Carl admitted. "And, besides," the lad went on, "a man high up on the mountain wouldn't be apt to shoot game lower down, unless he wanted a good chase after it."

"And all this indicates," Ben said, "that the man who did the shooting is somewhere near this camp. Also it indicates that he has a Maxim silencer on his gun, and that's a thing natives hereabouts don't have. Every time we go out on a trip we seem to bunt into a mystery first thing, and we've got one now, all right!"

"I wish Mr. Havens would come!" Carl cut in. "It may be that some one out here knows what we're up to and intends to make trouble."

While the boys talked a shout was heard in the distance, and two husky, roughly-dressed men made their appearance, heading directly for the camp-fire. The boys laid their hands on their automatics.

CHAPTER II.

A WOBBLING AEROPLANE.

THE boys stepped back from the bear as the men came up. It was growing dusk now, and as the men drew nearer their faces were seen only by the dancing flames of the fire. They were not prepossessing faces, and the boys wondered if it was the illumination which produced the shifty and suspicious glances they caught.

The two bent over the bear for an instant, and then one aimed his rifle slowly and fired a bullet into the animal's head. No report followed the shot, and then it was observed that the weapon carried a Maxim silencer. This doubtless accounted for the fact that the shot which had brought the bear down had not been heard at the camp.

After talking together in whispers for a moment, as the acrid smell of powder drifted out into the sweet air of the valley, the men turned questioning looks toward the boys. From the youthful faces their eyes soon roved to the two aeroplanes not far away.

There was more whispered talk, and then the two stepped over to the *Louise* and began a careful and rather impertinent inspection of the motors. The boys looked on angrily but said nothing.

"Rather fine machines you have there," one of the fellows said, after the deliberate examination had been completed.

"We think so!" Ben answered shortly.

"Where are you from?" asked the other intruder.

Ben gave Jimmie and Carl a sly nudge to remain silent and answered the question in a manner which, while the exact truth, did not reveal the starting place.

"Denver," he said.

The fellow bent down and read the names of the machines from little silver plates screwed to the frames.

"The *Louise* and the *Bertha*," he said. "It appears to me that I have heard something of these aeroplanes before."

"The names are common enough," Ben answered.

"The machines I refer to," the visitor went on, "belong in New York. Are you sure you didn't bring these machines from a hangar on Long Island?"

Jimmie could restrain himself no longer. From the first he had felt a feeling of aversion for the men, and he had inwardly resented not only the

question asked but the impudent and uncalled-for examination of the aeroplanes. In spite of a warning hand from Ben he blurted out:

"What do you care where we came from?"

The two intruders eyed the boy sharply for a moment, as if trying to look him out of countenance, and then one of them said:

"None of your lip, now, youngster!"

"Well!" exclaimed Jimmie. "You've got your nerve with you!"

The man who had spoken before seemed about to make an angry reply, but his companion drew him away, and again they talked together in whispers.

"What are you fellows doing here, anyhow?" Jimmie demanded. "If you think you're going to work the third degree on us, you've got another think coming! You're too fresh, anyway!"

Presently the men turned back to the boys again, and the light of the fire on their bearded faces showed that they were about to adopt a new course of conduct. The fellow who spoke smiled as he did so.

"I can't blame you for resenting our supposedly unwarranted interference," he said. "We should have informed you at first that we are in the employ of the Canadian government as mounted policemen."

"Where's your horses?" demanded Jimmie.

"At the other end of the valley."

"Where's your uniforms?"

"We rarely wear uniforms in rough mountain work."

The fellow answered the two questions with apparent frankness, but there was a set expression on his face which showed that he was restraining a naturally vicious temper by great effort.

Ben now stepped forward and extended a hand in greeting.

"We're glad to see you, I'm sure!" he said. "Still, I hardly think you will blame us for resenting apparently impertinent questions."

"That's all right, boy!" replied the other, trying his best to bring a conciliatory expression to his sullen face. "It's part of our duty, you understand, to visit camps in the mountains and make inquiries as to the intentions of strangers."

"We understand that, of course," Ben answered. "We are willing to answer any questions you care to ask, now that we know who you are."

"I hope you'll answer my first question in a manner entirely satisfactory to myself!" laughed the other.

"I shall try," answered Ben, "what is it?"

"Have you any coffee left?"

"You bet we have!" replied the boy. "And if you'll sit down here by the fire, we'll make you a quart inside of ten minutes."

Jimmie turned away to the provision box of the

Louise to bring out fresh coffee with apparent willingness, but both his companions saw an angry expression on his face.

Carl followed him back to the aeroplane and whispered as they bent over the coffee sack together:

"You don't like 'em, eh?"

"They're snakes!" was the reply.

"But they belong to the mounted police!"

"I don't believe it!"

"Anyway," warned Carl, "you've got to keep a civil tongue in your head and not let them know that you think they're lying."

"You don't believe that mounted police story yourself!" declared Jimmie. "They don't look like mounted policemen, either!"

"I hardly know what to believe," Carl replied, "but I've got sense enough not to let them know that I'm still guessing."

Jimmie returned to the fire with the coffee and sat down on the grass not far from the visitors. While Ben prepared supper one of the men walked out to the carcass of the grizzly and began removing the hide.

Carl rushed up to his side and stood looking down at the clumsy manner in which the fellow was operating.

"Say," the boy proposed in a moment, "why can't we all have bear steak for supper? We boys

had supper not long ago, but I think I could eat a bear steak right now!"

The man looked up with a puzzled expression.

"Bear steak for supper?" he repeated. "You don't eat bear meat, do you?"

"Would a duck take to the water?" asked Carl. "Of course we eat bear meat! Sometimes it's a little tough, unless you know exactly how to cook it, but I can broil a bear steak so it'll melt in your mouth!"

"Then do so by all means!" the visitor answered.

Carl removed several tender steaks, took them back to the fire and then called Jimmie to one side.

"You're all right, kiddo," he said, as the two seated themselves in the shadows some distance from the blaze.

"Have you just found that out?" demanded Jimmie.

"I mean about those imitation mounted policemen," Carl went on. "They're no more mounted policemen than I am!"

"Then they're a long ways from it!" Jimmie laughed. "But why this sudden conversion to my view of the case?"

"They don't know about eating bear meat!" was the scornful reply. "One of them just told me that he didn't know that they ever ate bear steak!"

"That does settle it!" cried Jimmie.

"Of course, it settles it!" agreed Carl. "And

now the question," he continued, "is this: What are they doing here, and why are they posing as mounted policemen? You don't suppose they've got word from New York, do you?"

"Word from New York about what?"

"About our being out looking for the post-office inspector the mail-order brigands abducted not long ago."

"Of course not!" was the reply. "These fellows are just plain mountain bums! They came here principally to get supper!"

"Or to steal the machines!" suggested Carl.

"We'll see that they don't steal the machines!" Jimmie declared.

"Well, I wish Mr. Havens would come," Carl put in, with rather a longing expression in his voice. "We don't know anything about the case we're handling, and we don't know whether we're going to remain in this camp an hour or a month. For all we know the men we are trying to find may be in Mexico before this!"

"If they're in Mexico," Jimmie suggested, "the United States government can go chase itself for all of me. If you don't remember what a beautiful time we had in Mexico, I do, and I don't want any more of it!"

Those who have read the previous volumes of this series will doubtless remember the adventures of the Flying Machine Boys at the burning moun-

tain. During that trip, it will be understood, they suffered the loss of some of their machines, and Jimmie came near meeting his death in a mountain lake known as the Devil's Pool.

"I'm going wherever Mr. Havens sends me," Carl answered, "and I'm going to get all the fun out of it there is to get. What's puzzling me now is to know exactly what we ought to do with these bums."

"Aw, we can't do anything with them," Jimmie grunted. "We've just got to feed them and see them hanging around here, trying to steal our machines, and sit peaceful, like a wooden Indian in front of a Bowery cigar store. It makes me sick!"

However, the boys were not called upon to take action of any kind at that time. Ben broiled bear steak enough for the whole party, made some excellent coffee, and brought out a couple of loaves of bread. At the conclusion of this second meal, at least on the part of the boys, the two intruders arose, threw their rifles over their shoulders, and turned away. However, one of them stepped back in a moment.

"We haven't seen you do any shooting yet," he said with a smile on his face which Ben regarded as most insincere, "but we don't know when you will be hunting big game, so you may as well show us your licenses."

"There!" Jimmie whispered to Carl as Ben pro-

duced the three licenses from an inside pocket. "They've saved their important question for the last moment!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Carl.

"Why, those fellows are not mounted policemen!" the boy answered.

"We had made up our minds to that before!"

"Then why should they want to see our licenses?"

"I know!" exclaimed Carl. "I know just why they want to see our licenses! They want to get our names!"

"That's it!" Jimmie answered. "They never asked to see the licenses in order to make good their bluff about being officers!"

After examining the papers the two visitors left the camp and proceeded down the valley to the west. Upon their departure the boys gathered closer about the fire and seriously discussed the situation.

At first Ben was inclined to argue that the men were actually Canadian officials, but Jimmie and Carl soon reasoned him out of this.

"Why," Jimmie said, "a mounted policeman would know how to skin a bear without cutting the hide full of holes, and he'd also know that bear steak is considered quite a luxury in British Columbia. They're frauds all right," and this view of the case was finally accepted by all.

Throughout the evening the boys kept their eyes open for the return of the unwelcome guests, but nothing was seen of them. At ten o'clock, when the lads were thinking of drawing lots to see who should remain on guard through the night, Jimmie caught sight of a strong light far up in the sky. Ben had his field glass out in a moment.

"That's the *Ann,* all right," he decided after a long inspection. "There's no other aeroplane in the world carries a light like that!"

"I'm glad Mr. Havens is coming," Jimmie said with a sigh of relief.

"I said it was the *Ann!*" Ben returned after another long look. "I didn't say Mr. Havens was flying her! It seems to me that the man on board doesn't know as much about the aviation game as Mr. Havens does. She's wobbling about something frightful!"

CHAPTER III.

JIMMIE'S DARING FEAT.

In ten minutes all doubts as to the identity of the aviator were dissipated by a signal from the sky which the boys all understood. Besides informing the boys of his presence, the signal also conveyed the intelligence that he was in need of assistance.

"I wish I had a ladder long enough to reach him!" Jimmie grumbled.

"We've got a ladder long enough to reach him!" insisted Carl.

Almost before the words were out of his chum's mouth, Jimmie was whirling the wheels of the *Louise* down the valley so as to get a good running ground, the machine having been drawn close to the fire after lighting. Understanding the boy's purpose, Carl lent a hand, and the aeroplane was soon facing a clear field.

"What are you boys going to do?" asked Ben.

"We're going up in the *Louise* to see what we can do for Mr. Havens!" Jimmie answered. "Didn't he say he needed help?"

"You can't help him after you get up there!" declared Ben.

"We can tell better about that after we get to him."

"All right, go it!" replied the other. "I'll remain here and watch the *Bertha* and the camp while you're gone. But look here," he continued, "if Mr. Havens is in bad shape, don't either one of you boys try to shift over to the *Ann*. If you do, you'll break your neck."

The next moment the *Louise* was in the air, her lights burning brilliantly. The *Ann* was still approaching, but staggering as if the aviator had lost all control. Below the boys saw Ben piling dry pine on the fire so as to provide a broadly-lighted landing-place for the oncoming machine.

"I don't know what we're going to do when we get up there," Jimmie shouted in Carl's ear, "but there's one thing sure, and that is that if we don't do something Mr. Havens will soon go crashing to the ground!"

The boys were now obliged to give over conversation, for the motors were in swift motion and the roar of an express train could hardly have been heard above the sparking.

When at last they came close to the *Ann* and swung about so as to move with her, they saw Mr. Havens sitting limply in the aviator's seat. His chin was lowered upon his breast, and he appeared

to be too weak or too dazed in mind to look up as the *Louise* swept past him, whirled and moved along directly above him.

The boys saw that the great machine was rapidly getting beyond his control. Had he understood the nature of the ground below, he might have shut off his motors and volplaned down, but they understood, of course, that the dark surface below was unknown territory to him.

For some reason, probably because the disabled aviator had realized that he was fast reaching his objective point and shut the motors down to half power, the *Ann* was not making good speed. The *Louise* slowed down so as to keep exact step with her and Jimmie bent over in his seat and looked past the edge of the upper plane to the framework and propeller of the *Ann*. Directly he sent the *Louise* faster for a second and looked under the edge of the *Ann's* upper wing to the vacant seat at the left of the aviator.

"Do you think," he shrilled into Carl's ear, "that I could get down into that seat?"

"Of course you can't!" answered Carl.

"I could if I had a rope!" insisted Jimmie.

"There's a rope in the box under your seat," Carl replied, "but there's no need of your attempting suicide!"

"Now, look here!" Jimmie argued, speaking very slowly and shouting to the full capacity of his

lungs in order to make his chum hear his words, "if you can hold this machine steadily above the *Ann,* without varying half an inch in her pace, I can drop past the upper plane of the lower machine, light on the framework, and climb into that seat."

"No one ever heard of such a thing being done!" declared Carl.

Before the words were out of Carl's mouth, Jimmie had the rope in his hands. He fastened it securely to the framework of the *Louise* and dropped one end down.

"Now," he called to Carl, "unless you hold the *Louise* exactly right, you'll get the rope tangled in the *Ann's* propeller, and then it will be all up with all of us!"

The boy's face was pale as death as, motioning Carl to shift his weight as much as possible so as to prevent the *Louise* swaying when he changed his position, the boy took hold of the rope and lowered himself.

In a second he felt his body brushing against the framework of the *Ann's* top wing. Then the rope began twisting and untwisting under his weight, and he whirled round and round like a top, until he became possessed by a feeling of dizziness.

He could see the ground, red with firelight, where the tents were and nothing else. He sensed that both machines were passing over the camp. At last, after what seemed to him an eternity, the twist-

ing rope brought him face to the vacant seat and to the disabled aviator, whose hands were limply touching the levers.

When at last the boy's feet touched the framework and he let go of the rope to cling to the edge of the plane, it seemed that the swaying of the machine must certainly throw him to the ground. However, he steadied himself for an instant, lowered himself at the knees and half fell forward clutching the seat when his outstretched hands came to it.

For a moment it did not seem possible that he was ever to recover his faculties again. Everything was in a whirl. The stars in the sky, the red light of the camp-fire on the cliff to the east, the dark bulk of the mountains farther away, all seemed mixed in a great jumble, in which nothing was distinct and everything seemed to be mixed with everything else.

When his mind cleared he saw that Mr. Havens' hands were dropping from the levers. Another instant of indecision or inactivity would have brought death to them both. He seized the levers, and the *Ann* swung upward again, steady as the hands on the dial under his confident touch.

The rope which he had used still hung down from the *Louise* and, reaching forward, he gave it several quick jerks to indicate that he was safe. Then he saw the *Louise* shoot ahead, and knew that Carl was looking back toward him. The rope had been

drawn up as soon as his signals had been received. The warning against permitting it to become entangled in the propellers of the *Ann* had been remembered by Carl.

Both machines were now some distance west of the camp-fire, but the boys came slowly around and dropped. During the last few yards of the slanting journey through the dark air, Jimmie was obliged to steady Mr. Havens in his seat. When at last the strain was over and the great flying machines lay on the rich grass below, the millionaire aviator fairly fell from his seat.

When Carl and Ben came forward to greet Jimmie, their faces were as white as snow. Their hands trembled as they extended them to the boy.

"He would do it!" Carl exclaimed. "I tried to get him not to!"

"Some one had to do it!" declared Jimmie, pointing significantly to the huddled figure on the ground by the side of the *Ann*.

"It's a wonder you didn't kill yourself and Mr. Havens and Carl also," exclaimed Ben. "Why, look here, boys," he went on with a trembling voice, "if that rope had swung out a few inches farther, you would have been ground to pieces in the propellers, and the *Ann* would have dropped to the ground like a stone! The rope you held would have drawn the *Louise* down with you! It was an awful risk to take!"

"If I hadn't taken it," Jimmie answered, "Mr. Havens would have fallen from his seat. His hands were dropping from the levers when I reached his side. Five seconds more and he would have gone down."

"In all the history of aviation," Ben declared, "nothing of that kind was ever done before! The wildest imagination cannot conceive of a person leaving one machine and taking a position on another while in the air! It is an unheard-of thing."

"Well, it's been done once!" declared Jimmie. "And it may be done again. And now, if you've got all the kinks out of your system, perhaps you'd better help me take Mr. Havens into one of the tents."

"I can't lift a pound!" declared Carl. "I thought for a second that Jimmie had been obliged to let go of the rope and drop!"

Ben and Jimmie lifted the millionaire aviator, now almost unconscious, and carried him into one of the shelter-tents. His face was very pale and his breathing was uncertain.

"I don't see what's the matter with him," Jimmie exclaimed after examining the man's head and breast. "There is no wound here that I can find!"

Then Ben pointed to the aviator's feet.

"Strange we didn't notice those before!" he said.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jimmie with a shudder. "Have his feet been cut off?"

The aviator wore no shoes, and his feet were closely wrapped in bandages which had evidently been made from one of the blankets carried in the store-box of the *Ann*. The bandages were stiff with congealed blood.

Ben began to remove the cords which held the bandages in place, but Jimmie motioned him away.

"We'll have to get hot water before we can get those off!" the boy said. "We'll need plenty of hot water, anyway, so you'd better go and tell Carl to put on the big kettle."

While Ben was gone, Mr. Havens opened his eyes. He glanced around the tent and smiled when his eyes encountered those of his companions.

"Did I fall?" he asked faintly.

"I should say not!" was the reply. "I guess if you'd had a tumble out of the air, you wouldn't be lying here in this tent, able to talk, would you? You'd be all smashed up on the rocks!"

"I felt myself falling!" insisted the aviator.

"That was after the machine landed," Jimmie explained.

"Did some one get into the seat with me?" the voice went on weakly.

"Why, sure!" replied Jimmie. "I dropped over into the seat and we came down together. Don't you remember that?"

"I do not!" smiled the aviator.

"We saw something was the matter with you," Jimmie went on, "and so Carl and I went up to see what caused the *Ann* to reel along like a drunken sailor. We got there just in time!"

"I was weak from loss of blood," replied Mr. Havens. "I camped last night in a valley occupied by hosts of yellow-haired porcupines."

"I've heard of 'em," Jimmie grinned.

"In the night," the injured man went on, "I got out of my sleeping bag to mend the fire and stepped on a whole host of the fellows, cutting my feet into ribbons, almost."

"Wouldn't they get out of the way?" asked the boy.

"They never get out of the way!" was the answer. "Instead, they will walk in a man's path, like a pet kitten, and refuse to turn aside."

"Did you get the quills all out of your feet?"

"I don't know whether I did or not. They bled terribly, and I am now in great pain with them. You boys will have to find out about that later on! I'm too tired now to talk."

Ben now brought a kettle of blood-warm water while Carl appeared with a cup of strong coffee. After the aviator had swallowed the coffee, the bandages were removed and his feet carefully examined. There were many quills still in the flesh, they having worked in instead of out, as is usual

in such cases. These had caused the bleeding to continue, and this in a measure accounted for Mr. Havens' weakened condition.

By midnight the aviator was able to sit up and listen to the story of the two visitors.

"I quite agree with you," he said, after Ben had concluded the recital, "there is no doubt in my mind that the men are simply mountain bums. And I'm afraid that we'll have trouble with them in future. These machines must be guarded night and day!"

"How long are we going to stay in this blooming old valley?" asked Jimmie. "I'd rather be sailing over the mountains!"

"You can go sailing over the mountains to-night if you want to," Carl chuckled, pointing, "there seems to be a beacon fire waiting for you!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF COLLETON.

"I'm glad the fellows took the trouble of building a fire of their own instead of wanting to lounge around ours all night," Jimmie observed, as the boys looked at the leaping flames toward the north end of the slope. "I should think they'd freeze up there!"

"I hope they do!" cried Carl.

"I wish we had some way of finding out what they are doing here," Ben said. "They don't look like mountain men to me."

"There are probably a great many such characters in the mountains," Mr. Havens explained. "Perhaps they'll let us alone if we let them alone."

"Is there any chance of their being here to interfere with our work?" asked Carl. "It really seems that way to me."

"I don't think so," the millionaire aviator replied.

"What did you learn at Denver?" asked Ben.

"Was there any indication in the messages received from Washington that the mail-order frauds were turning their attention to the west?"

"Not a word!" replied Mr. Havens. "We have a clear field here, and all we've got to do is to locate this Larry Colleton. I shall probably be laid up with sore feet for a number of days, but that won't prevent you boys flying over the country in the machines looking for camps."

"Huh!" grinned Jimmie. "They won't keep Colleton in no camp! They'll keep him in some damp old hole in the ground."

"I presume that's right, too," Mr. Havens replied. "But you boys mustn't look for camps entirely. Whenever you see people moving about, it's up to you to investigate, find out who they are and where they are stopping. You'll find that all this will keep you busy."

"We're likely to be kept busy if there are a lot of tramps in the hills!" Ben answered, "for the reason that it may take two or three days to chase down each party we discover."

"I haven't told you much about the case yet," Mr. Havens continued, "and I may as well do so now. About six months ago, letters began coming to the post-office department at Washington complaining that a certain patent medicine concern which was advertising an alleged remedy, Kuro, was defrauding its customers by sending about one

cent's worth of quinine and water in return for two dollars in money."

"Keen, level-headed business men!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"Larry Colleton, one of the best inspectors in the department, was given the case. For a long time, after the investigation began, this Kuro company manufactured a remedy which really worked some of the cures described in the advertising. This was expensive, however, and at times the shipments fell back to the one-cent bottle of quinine water."

"More thrift!" laughed Ben.

"Another fraud-charge was that the Kuro company often failed to make any shipment whatever in return for money received. Colleton bought hundreds of bottles of their remedy, but the difficult point was to establish the fact that the company was not at the time of the investigation manufacturing the honest medicine. The officers of the company claimed that they were perfecting their medicine every day, and admitted that some of the bottles sent out at first were not what they should have been."

"Why didn't he pinch the whole bunch?" demanded Jimmie.

"He did!" answered Mr. Havens. "But time after time they escaped punishment by being discharged on examination by United States district court commissioners, or by having their cases flatly

turned down by men employed in the laboratories at Washington."

Mr. Havens was about to continue when Ben motioned him to look in the direction of the blaze, still showing on a shelf of the slope to the north. The fire was burning green.

"What does that mean?" the boy asked.

"It means that they are talking to some person on the other side of the valley or in the valley," Mr. Havens answered. "It struck me, when the fire was first pointed out, that no man in his right mind would be apt to set up a camp in that exposed position."

"Just before I called your attention to the fire," Ben remarked, "it was showing red. There, you see," he added, in a moment, "it is turning red right now! Of course the lights mean something to some one."

"That busts your theory about the fellows being mountain tramps!" exclaimed Jimmie. "Such wouldn't be carrying red and green fire and rifles with Maxim silencers!"

"They may be mounted policemen after all!" suggested Mr. Havens.

"Not on your whiskers!" exclaimed Carl. "Do you think mounted policemen wouldn't know how to skin a bear, or know how to broil a bear steak? You just bet your life these fellows know more

about riding on the elevated or in the subway than they do about traveling on horseback!"

"Well," Mr. Havens went on, "one of you boys watch the lights and the others listen to the story of how the crooks got Colleton. It may be necessary in the future that you should know exactly how the trick was turned. After a long investigation, and after bribing several men in the factory where the alleged remedy was manufactured, Mr. Colleton secured the exact formula in use during the current week. He also secured a long list of names of persons to whom the bogus remedy manufactured that week had been shipped."

"Then, why didn't he drop down on the concern?" asked Carl.

"He did!" was the answer. "He arrested the officers of the company and subpœnaed scores of witnesses. He also secured proof that men in the employ of the government had been bribed by the Kuro concern to retard the work of the inspector and to assist in the destruction of any proof submitted to the commissioner by him."

"Why didn't you say that before?" asked Jimmie. "If you'd just said that Colleton was fighting the department at Washington as well as the patent medicine concern, we would have understood what kind of a case we were getting into."

"Well, you know it now!" laughed Mr. Havens. "At last," he continued, "Colleton had his case

ready for the grand jury, the district commissioner having placed the respondents under heavy bail to await such action."

"And what happened then?" asked Carl.

"He lost his proof and he lost himself," smiled the aviator. "Colleton expected a long fight before the grand jury, a fight in the district court, a fight in the circuit court, a fight in the court of appeals, and a final fight before the United States Supreme court, for he knew that the Kuro people had plenty of money and the kind of influence which counts in an emergency."

"And then what happened?"

"Colleton knew that he had a legal fight on his hands, but he never suspected that he had a personal fight. One day he disappeared from his office in the post-office department at Washington, and his proof disappeared with him. He has never been seen by his friends since that day."

"And now we've got to find him!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"That's what we've got to do!" echoed Carl.

"But, I don't understand how they got him out of his own room, and got his proof out of the building without attracting attention!" Ben suggested. "They must have had several operatives at work."

"They certainly did!" was the reply. "Colleton was sitting in his office at three: fifteen one Monday afternoon. The safe in which his papers were kept

was locked. The desk in which his memoranda were stored was also locked. When last seen sitting at his desk, he was making memoranda concerning a case not at all connected with the Kuro matter. These papers were not taken."

"That was bad editing!" Ben laughed. "They should have taken all the papers in sight in order not to disclose the real object of the robbery. The rascals slipped a cog there!"

"The first error in the whole case," Mr. Havens went on. "Only for the fact that Kuro papers were taken exclusively, it might have been claimed that the respondents in some of the other criminal cases being handled by Colleton had committed the outrage."

"Where did Colleton go when he left his office?" asked Ben.

"That's exactly what we don't know."

"Who saw him leave his office?"

"No one."

"Well, then, who saw any one enter his office?"

"No one."

"Well," laughed Ben, "how could Colleton get out of his office without being seen? Perhaps he went out unobserved and took the proof with him! You haven't said whether the safe and desk were opened."

"They were opened," was the reply, "by some one knowing the combination to the safe, and some

one having a key to the desk. All the proof collected by Colleton disappeared that day."

"And the patent medicine men finally got up to his price!" grinned Jimmie. "I guess it's the old story!"

"That's what makes it so provoking," said Mr. Havens, impatiently. "A good many people in Washington are saying the same thing. It is unjust to the inspector and very annoying to his friends."

"And no one went into his office that afternoon?" asked Carl.

"Not that we know of."

"And no one went near his office door?" asked Jimmie.

"I didn't say that!" replied Mr. Havens. "His office door opens on a wide corridor, at that time being used as desk space by an overflow of clerks. At three: ten that afternoon two men stopped at Colleton's door, but did not enter."

"How do you know they didn't enter?" Carl broke in.

"No one saw them enter or come out. No one heard the door open or close. One of the men, a heavily-built, bearded fellow, seemed to be urging the other to enter Colleton's room. The man who was being urged was younger, thinner, and appeared to be greatly excited."

"Were they the only men seen at that door about that time?" asked Ben.

"So it is said," was the reply.

"And Colleton was at his desk just before the men were seen at his door?" asked Jimmie.

"Five minutes before!"

"And the person who entered his room after the two men departed found it vacant?"

"That's the idea exactly!"

"Did you say the young thin man was excited?"

"Perhaps excited is not the correct word," was Mr. Havens' reply. "He seemed to be dazed with fear. The clerk sitting near the door received the idea that the man had nerved himself up to the point of confessing a crime or a dereliction of duty, and had lost his courage when he reached the door of the inspector's room."

"Did this young man look like Colleton?" asked Ben.

"Not at all. Colleton wore a light moustache only. This man wore a full beard. Colleton's eyes are bright, snappy, far-seeing. This man's eyes looked dull and lifeless under the glasses he wore. Colleton is straight, alert, confident. This man dragged his feet as he walked and his shoulders hunched together."

"Where did the two men go after they left Colleton's door?" asked Ben. "Did no one watch them?"

"No further attention was paid to them."

"Would any of the clerks in the corridor know the big fellow again?"

"I don't think so. I don't think they paid enough attention to know whether his eyes were blue or black or brown."

"Then they didn't notice the other fellow very particularly, did they?"

"No, in fact, except for his dazed and dejected manner and his odd dress they probably wouldn't have noticed the young man particularly. But why are you asking these questions," Mr. Havens answered with a laugh. "Are you boys going to solve, off-hand, a mystery over which Washington detectives have been puzzling for many weeks?"

"No," Ben answered, "but I know when Colleton left his room."

CHAPTER V.

A MIDNIGHT FLIGHT.

"THEN you know more about the case than the detectives at Washington!" smiled Mr. Havens. "When do you think he left his room?"

"I don't think, I know!"

"Well, get it out of your system!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"He left his room," Ben chuckled, "about one second before those two men appeared in the corridor outside his door!"

"I suppose you happened to be coming out of another office, just across the corridor, and happened to see him coming out, didn't you?" jeered Carl. "You always were the wise little boy!"

"Now, look here," Ben said, more seriously, "me for the Brainy Bowers act in this little play. In time the truth of the matter will be known, and when that time comes you just remember your Uncle Dudley's forecast."

"You haven't made any forecast yet!"

"I'll make a guess then," Ben answered. "I'll

just call it a guess. I'll guess that Colleton came out of his room with the big man, and that he was doped stiff, and that he had the proofs in his inside pocket, and that the big man got him away under the eyes of a dozen clerks, and probably passed a score of detectives before he got out of the building."

"But look here," Mr. Havens began.

"Please, Mr. Havens," Jimmie broke in, "don't wake him up. Let him go on dreaming! He'll feel all the better for it in the morning!"

"I don't care what you say!" Ben argued. "The big man took Colleton out of his room. If you want to know whom to look for in this case, just you look for the big man. And if you want to get a sure case against him, find some one of the clerks who can identify him as the man who stood at Colleton's door that afternoon."

"I half believe you are right!" Havens declared.

"It listens good to me," Jimmie agreed.

"I want to withdraw everything I said against the theory," Carl cut in.

"Look here!" Ben said rather excitedly. "Those fellows who claimed to be mounted policemen are both big men, and they both wear full beards. Now it seems to me that the man who took Colleton out of his office would be the man to keep him under duress until the excitement of the case dies down."

"For the love of Mike!" Jimmie exclaimed. "Don't go to materializing the man with the alfalfa on his face right here in the mountains."

"That's the man we're looking for," suggested Ben.

"Well, let's don't find him until we've had a little more fun flying over British Columbia!"

"Say, Mr. Havens," Ben proposed. "You ought to send word to Washington to have one or two of the most intelligent of those clerks sent out here. When we get the man with the full beard we'll want some one to tell us whether we're right or not."

"I'll do that the first time I reach a telegraph office," the aviator replied. "That ought to have been thought of long ago."

"It strikes me that you won't get to a telegraph office very soon!" laughed Jimmie. "You'll have a mess of feet that look like bread dough by morning! Those porcupine quills often poison as well as wound."

"Well, you boys can send the message then," returned Mr. Havens.

"And you can watch camp!" laughed Carl.

"I'm afraid that's what I'll have to do."

"What has been done with the case against the Kuro company?" Ben asked after a short silence.

"Still pending in the courts. Of course, the government can't proceed to trial in the absence of inspector Colleton."

"Then if Colleton should be murdered, the case might never be tried?"

"It certainly never would be tried!"

"Then we've got to get a move on!" cried Jimmie. "If these fellows know that special effort is being made to locate him, they won't take any chances. The nearer we get to Colleton, the nearer he will be to his death. At least that's the way I look at it."

"That's the way it looks to me, too," Ben agreed.

Carl now caught Jimmie by the arm and pointed to the fire burning on the mountain to the north.

"It burns green now," he said.

While they looked the flame turned red again.

"I wouldn't mind going over there to-night!" Jimmie declared.

"Then let's go," advised Carl.

"Huh! I didn't say anything about your going!"

"You know very well you always have to have me with you," Carl chuckled. "You get into trouble when you go alone."

"Here," Ben called from the tent where Mr. Havens lay, "what are you boys planning now? No one leaves the camp to-night, understand!"

"Of course not," grinned Jimmie.

"I should say not!" echoed Carl.

"Now, this is on the level," Ben argued. "If you boys are planning anything for to-night, you

want to quit it, right now! If those fellows around that other fire are watching us, you couldn't do a thing that would please them more than to wander off in the darkness."

"Who said anything about wandering off in the darkness?" demanded Jimmie. "You're always seeing things that are not present."

"Anyway," Carl said with a yawn, "it's time we were all in bed!"

"I'll watch to-night," Ben proposed, with a significant glance in the direction of the aviator.

"And look here," Jimmie suggested, "suppose you keep a record of the changes of color over on the mountain. I believe those people are saying something with those green and red lights!"

"All right," Ben replied, "I'll do that."

"I don't suppose I'll sleep very much to-night, anyway," Mr. Havens said, after a pause, "so you may as well go to bed, every one of you, and I'll wake you if anything unusual occurs."

"I think I'd better keep awake," Ben insisted.

Jimmie and Carl stepped to one side, ostensibly in search of dry pine for use during the night, but really to discuss this unexpected opposition to the excursion they had planned.

"We can't go if they make such a noise about it!" Carl complained.

"Sure we can!" returned Jimmie.

"I don't know how!" Carl grumbled.

"I can fix up a scheme to get away in the machine with the advice and consent of the multitude," laughed the other.

"In your mind!" returned Carl.

"Watch me!" advised Jimmie.

The boys went back to the camp-fire and stood for some moments watching the changing lights on the mountain.

"I'd like to know if some one is really talking back to that fellow," Jimmie said, turning to Mr. Havens.

"I presume some one is answering the signals," the millionaire answered, "only we can't see the answers given."

"Perhaps we could learn what they're saying if we could see the answers. They may be talking in a code we could get next to."

"Well, you don't see anything that looks like a return signal, do you?" asked Ben. "They'll take good care that we don't see both ends of the conversation."

"Look here," proposed Jimmie, "why don't we send Ben up in a machine to look over the landscape. The return signals may come from some point not to be seen from this end of the valley."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed Carl, understanding in a minute why his chum had suggested that Ben make the midnight flight.

"Not for me!" answered Ben. "I don't care

about going up into the sky refrigerator this time of night!"

"Then you go, Carl," Jimmie said turning to the other.

"Not so you could notice it!" Carl declared.

"All right!" Jimmie said with an injured air. "I made one exhausting flight to-night and I suppose I could make another. We certainly ought to know whether those people are signaling to others in the mountains. Don't you think so, Mr. Havens?" he added turning to the millionaire.

"It would enable us to understand the situation better," was the reply.

"Then I'll go," Jimmie said, putting on an unwilling manner. "I'll go up far enough to see what's doing and come right back. While I'm gone you fellows get up a supper. It's most daylight and we haven't had anything to eat since last night."

"You had only two suppers last night!" Ben laughed.

"I don't care if I had nine," Jimmie answered, "I'm hungry just the same, and when I come back from my little trip, I'll be about famished!"

"I guess I'll go with you," suggested Carl.

"No, you don't," declared Jimmie, with a sly wink. "You wouldn't go when I wanted you to, and now you can't go with me!"

"Do you think they ought to go, Mr. Havens?" asked Ben.

"If they can go without getting into any scrape, yes!"

"But they'll be sure to get into trouble," Ben complained.

"Trouble yourself!" cried Jimmie. "I guess we can swing around this little old valley without it being necessary for you to send out a relief expedition! You act like I never saw a flying machine before!"

"Perhaps they'll be good to-night," Mr. Havens laughed.

The millionaire saw how set the boys were on taking the trip in the aeroplane. He rather suspected that Jimmie had mapped out the exact course to be pursued in getting permission, and laughed at the tact displayed by the little fellow. He remembered, however, the great risk the boy had taken in order to be of service to him that very night, and so decided in his favor.

"Do I go?" demanded Carl.

"Well, come along if you want to," Jimmie answered, with apparent reluctance. "If you break your neck, don't blame me!"

The boys passed out of the circle of light about the fire and drew the *Louise* out to level ground. Jimmie could hear his chum chuckling softly as they pushed and pulled together.

"Didn't I tell you I could fix it up all right?" the boy asked.

"You're the foxy little kid!" exclaimed Carl. "What are we going to do when we get up in the air?" he continued.

"We're going to circle the valley," Jimmie answered, "and see if we can catch sight of another camp-fire. Then we're going to climb up until we can look over the ridges in this vicinity. If there is a collection of mail-order pirates anywhere in this country we want to know it to-night."

"Then we want to put on lots of warm clothing," Carl suggested, "and take automatics and searchlights with us."

"Of course!" answered Jimmie. "We want to go prepared for zero weather. It's always cold up on the top of the Continental Divide!"

"And that's all you're going to do?" asked Carl. "Just fly around the camp and locate the other camp-fires and then go to bed?"

"Well, of course," Jimmie said hesitatingly, "if we find a camp that looks in any way suspicious, we ought to investigate it a little. We can't get very close with the motors, you know, without attracting a whole lot of attention, so we may have to land and sneak up to find out what's going on. We can't learn much by sailing a thousand feet over a camp!"

"That's just what I thought!" laughed Carl. "Just as quick as you get away in a machine you

want to take a lot of risks that no one else would think of taking."

Jimmie's only reply was a confident chuckle, and the boys were soon in the air. As the pneumatic tires left the ground Ben waved them "Good-bye" and shouted for them to be careful if they couldn't be good.

In ten minutes the *Louise* was over the camp-fire, which had been observed all night. Nothing was to be seen but the springing flames. There was no human being in sight.

"Well," Jimmie said, as they circled the spot for the second time and darted away to the east, "we'll have to light and creep up!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOSS OF THE LOUISE.

"I'd like to see you find a place where you can land," Carl shouted in his chum's ear. "There's nothing here but ridges and canyons, and rocks and rivers at the bottom!"

"Oh, we can find a place all right," Jimmie answered.

It was some time before the boy found a spot which appeared to be in any way suitable for a landing. This was some distance to the east of the ridge which shut in the valley. The shelf he selected was rather high up, and that suited his purpose well, for, as he explained to Carl, they would have less mountain to climb in order to get a look into the camp.

The aeroplane landed with a bump which nearly threw the boys out of their seats, and when Jimmie sprang off and looked about he saw that one of the wheels was actually whirling round and round in the air, having passed off the rock. Below, five hundred feet down, the murmur of running water could be heard.

"Gee-whiz!" exclaimed Carl, when the position of the wheel was pointed out to him. "That was a close call! If the other wheel had run two feet farther, we'd have been dumped into the canyon."

"But it didn't run two feet farther!" Jimmie insisted. "I never saw any advantage in raising a mess of ifs," he went on. "If the sun should drop down some night, the world would drop, too. But it doesn't, so what's the use?"

"What next?" asked Carl.

"You stay here and watch the machine and I'll sneak over the ridge and crawl down to the camp. I'm curious to know why those fellows are showing those colored lights."

"If you get too close to them, you may find out things that won't do you any good."

"Don't croak!" advised Jimmie. "I'll just go down there and see how many there are in the camp, and what they're doing, and what they're saying, and come right back!"

"I've got a picture of your doing that! Now look here," Carl went on, "you want to remember that I'm staying here by this machine in zero weather, or worse, so you don't want to go poking about until daylight. My fingers are frozen stiff now!"

"Run up and down and keep warm, little one!" laughed Jimmie.

Before Carl could reply the boy was off, scram-

bling up the rocky face of the slope which led to the summit. It was stinging cold, and the boy needed all the exercise he was getting in order to keep his blood in circulation. Although not on the main ridge of the Great Divide, the boy was pretty high up.

Before he came to a position from which the valley to the west might be seen, Jimmie found that he was wading in snow. There was no moon, but stars shone down from a clear sky.

When he reached the crest he saw the camp-fire two or three hundred feet below, built on a shelf of rock which seemed to afford no protection whatever from the cold winds swirling around the peaks.

"I don't believe that's any camp at all!" the boy mused. "It's just a signal station, and the operator is probably wrapped up in fur overcoats a foot thick. I guess about all I can do here," he went on, "is to see if there is another fire in sight."

The western slope of the ridge was much steeper than the one he had already ascended, so at times the lad approached the hostile camp-fire a great deal faster than he wanted to. He tried to proceed cautiously, without making any noise, but now and then when his feet slipped and he rolled half a dozen paces, to be caught at last by a little crevice or a narrow shelf, small rocks became dislodged and went thundering down.

"Might just as well take a band," Jimmie mused disgustedly.

When the boy came to within a few yards of the fire he saw that only one figure was in sight. As he had predicted he would be, the lone guardian of the fire was well bundled up in furs. If the motors had attracted his attention his manner gave no indication of the fact.

"Looks like a wooden Indian," chuckled Jimmie.

There was no place for the boy to secrete himself in the vicinity of the fire, so he crouched down on the slope and looked over the landscape beyond. He could see his own camp-fire quite distinctly, but no other light was in sight for several moments.

Then what seemed like the blood-red light of an early August moon showed on a level of rock far off on the west side of the valley.

"They're burning red fire over there, too," he mused as the situation became clearer in his mind.

The boy climbed back up the slope for a few yards and looked again, but the fire itself was not in sight and only the reflection showed on a slender surface of rock beyond. While he looked the color changed to green, which showed indistinctly under the stars.

From his new position Jimmie could see his own camp to better advantage than from the one lower down. He sat watching it for some moments, won-

dering why Ben was moving around the blaze so actively and why Mr. Havens had left the tent.

There certainly were two figures outlined against the blaze. The lad studied the puzzle intently for a moment and then started back. He understood that it would be of no use for him to try to get nearer to the fire below. The man on watch there would be conscious of his approach before he was within a hundred feet.

From the ridge the boy looked back to his camp again. There were now four figures outlined against the blaze, and all appeared to be moving about as if acting under great excitement.

Jimmie tried his best to discover whether any of the figures were those of Mr. Havens and Ben, but the distance was too great. He could only see the figures moving about. As he looked and studied over the proposition he blamed himself for not bringing his field-glass, but his self-reproach was, of course, unavailing.

Knowing that he ought to be making his way back to the camp, the boy still remained gazing downward as if fascinated. He had no reason to believe that the visitors he saw were at the camp with friendly intent. He knew that his friends might be in great danger. Still, he sat and watched the fire like one dazed.

There had been no sound of motors, yet the intruders at the camp had penetrated the valley since

nightfall. Or had they been hiding there at the time the boys landed? While the boy puzzled over the situation a mass of rocks left the summit not far to the north and went racing down the slope, making sufficient noise, as Jimmie believed, to incite a riot a hundred miles away!

"Now there's some one sleuthing in that direction," the boy mused. "Of course, he was at the camp-fire when he heard the motors and ducked. Now he's up there watching me, I presume."

The lad turned toward the snow-capped summit once more, resolved to get away to his own camp as soon as possible. When he reached the top the clatter of motors came to his ears. He looked down in dismay to see the *Louise* lifting into the air.

"Now, what's that fool Carl doing?" he muttered.

The aeroplane left the shelf with a little dip over the precipice and struck out for the west, passing nearly over the wondering boy's head. The acetylene lamp which had been arranged on the forward framework was burning brightly, and Jimmie could see that both seats were occupied. The lamp had been turned low just before his departure.

The boy paused at the summit and looked back into the valley. There was no need now for him to cross to the eastern slope. He had no doubt that the *Louise* had been stolen, and that Carl was driving her away under duress. In order to reach the

camp he would be obliged to pass down the steep slope which led to the bottom of the valley.

Blaming himself for leaving the machine even for a moment, yet by no means disheartened at the calamity which had overtaken him, the boy turned his face to the south resolved to pass along the broken summit until he had passed the vicinity of the camp below and then work his way diagonally down the slope. As he took his first step downward he heard a voice softly calling his name.

"Jimmie!" the voice said. "Hello, Jimmie."

Jimmie stopped and looked back. A figure was approaching him from the north, crouching down close to the slope of the rocks.

"Carl!" he called. "Is that you?"

"Sure!" was the reply. "I thought you had gone off in the machine."

"Then you went away and left her, did you?" demanded Jimmie.

"Of course I did. I wanted to see what was going on!"

"Did you see the people who took the machine away?" asked Jimmie.

"I saw two figures—no faces," was the reply.

"Well," Jimmie grunted, "we've got a nice little walk back to camp!"

"I hope we don't freeze to death on the way down," Carl cut in.

The boys walked steadily for a few moments, and

then Jimmie stopped and regarded his companion with a questioning look.

"Are you game?" he finally asked.

"I'm game!" Carl answered. "We've lost the machine, and it doesn't make any difference what happens now."

"That's the way I look at it!" Jimmie returned. "What do you want to do?"

"Now, look here," Jimmie explained. "There's only one person at the fire from which the signals were sent. He sits there like a wooden Indian, probably three-fourths asleep. The two men who went away on the *Louise* probably left the camp about the time we left the machine and went over the ridge to seize it. Now, suppose we go down there where that fellow sits alone and hold him up!"

"Hold him up for what?" chuckled Carl, immensely pleased at the idea.

"Information!" answered Jimmie.

"Yes, and I suppose you'd believe anything he told you, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed, I wouldn't! But, by going to the camp, we can doubtless learn something regarding the situation."

Carl hesitated a moment and then asked:

"Did you see our camp from where you lay?"

Jimmie nodded.

"So you saw the commotion down there, too, did you?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Carl, "and I'm for getting down there just as quick as possible. I'm so scared about what I saw around our fire that I'm not thinking very seriously of the loss of the *Louise*."

In a moment the boys came out of a slight wrinkle which they had been traveling and looked down on the camp they had left not long before. Four figures were still moving in front of the blaze.

"Now, don't you think we ought to hustle down there?" demanded Carl. "If we get down there without being discovered and find out that something is wrong, we can plug every one of those ginks in the back of the head before they know we're within a mile of them."

"That wouldn't help much," Jimmie answered. "We might drive those fellows away, if we were lucky enough to do so, but others might take their places. I'm stuck on finding out what they want and how they expect to get it. That's the thing that will count."

"Then run along and ask them," Carl suggested, with an impatience which was not usual with the boy.

"Honest, now," Jimmie said in a conciliatory tone, "I believe we can go down to this hostile camp and hold that fellow up for information. If

we get it, we will know just what to do when we get to our own camp."

"If we ever get there!"

"Are you going?" asked Jimmie.

"Sure, I'm going!" was the reply. "I'm game to go anywhere you'll go. And we can't get down there too quick, either."

The boys started down the declivity and then halted abruptly. The *Louise* was swinging back to the east, and seemed about to settle down upon the shelf where the alien camp had been pitched.

"That's good!" Jimmie chuckled. "If they bring that machine down here, I can give a good guess as to who will take it away."

CHAPTER VII.

THREE HUNGRY MEN.

After the departure of Jimmie and Carl, Ben sat in the shelter-tent by the side of the injured man until he was half asleep. Mr. Havens had fallen into a light slumber, and there was no one to talk to. He finally arose and walked out to the fire, looking about for some sign of the flying machine as he did so.

The *Louise* was not in sight, being at that time beyond the ridge to the east, but the boy saw something which contributed wonderfully to his wakefulness. A great mountain rat was creeping out of the long grass toward the spot where the refuse of the meals which had been served offered a tempting repast.

As much to keep awake as anything else, he watched the nimble-footed, sharp-eyed rodent advancing inch by inch toward its supper. Whenever he moved a hand or foot the rat darted back and was lost to view. While he watched, Mr. Havens called softly from the tent.

"Shoot all the rats you see, Ben," the aviator said. "If he gets a bellyful here every rat in the Rocky mountains will know it before daybreak. We may stay here several days, and can't afford to fight rats every hour of the day and night!"

Ben drew his revolver and when the rat appeared again, fired. He missed at the first shot and fired again and again, until the rodent lay dead halfway between his hiding-place and the tempting bait.

"That looks wicked to me," Ben declared as he reloaded his automatic.

"Self-preservation, you know," Mr. Havens explained. "The rats would eat us alive in less than a week if we let one get away well-fed."

Ben went back to the tent and sat down, but, at the suggestion of the aviator, left almost immediately to bury the body of the rat and the garbage which had drawn him to the camp. While engaged in this occupation, he heard a call from the grass to the south.

"Don't shoot!" the voice said, in what seemed to be a tremor of alarm.

Ben sprang back to the tent and lifted his automatic from the blanket where he had laid it. Mr. Havens motioned toward another weapon and Ben placed it in his hand. Then the two stood waiting.

"Don't shoot!" the voice from the darkness repeated. "We mean you no harm! We are lost in the mountains!"

"Who are you?" asked Ben, as footsteps advanced and three figures became distinguishable under the light of the fire.

"Campers who have lost our way," was the answer.

The three men came on until their faces as well as their figures were under the glow of the blaze. They held their hands out to show that they were not carrying weapons.

"The shots you heard were directed at a mountain rat," Ben explained, as the men came up to where he stood.

The men revealed by the light of the camp-fire appeared at first sight to be entirely unfamiliar with the usages of the mountains. They were dressed in tailor-made clothes of good material, but their faces were blackened by smoke and bore scraggly beards of a week's growth.

"Beg pardon," one of the men said briskly as he stepped closer to the fire. "Our intrusion is entirely unpremeditated."

"We left our camp early this morning," another member of the little group cut in, "and lost our way. We have been chased by grizzlies and have fallen into gulches and canyons until we are about used up."

"You are hungry?" asked Ben.

"Hungry?" repeated one of the visitors. "I never was so hungry in my life. To tell the truth,

we never expected to see a camp-fire or a square meal again. Of all the blasted countries on the face of the earth, this mountain district of British Columbia takes the lead!"

"Where's your camp?" asked Ben.

"I wish I knew," answered one of the others. "We came in here a week ago for a month's shooting and we've been trying to keep track of our camp ever since. It seems to me that it shifts about from point to point whenever we leave it!"

"Now, look here, Dick," one of the other men interrupted, "Steve and I know what kind of a liar you are, but this stranger doesn't. First thing you know, you'll give him the impression that we're all candidates for the foolish house. If you want to draw on your imagination, jest tell him how hungry you are."

"I'm so hungry," Dick answered, "that I could eat grass like the old king who was turned out to pasture a good many hundred years ago. I've been thinking for several hours of slicing down a couple of these peaks and making a grass sandwich. I should have done it, too, only I was afraid of finding a nest of rattlers in the grass."

"Well," Ben said with a chuckle at the fellow's exaggeration, "if you want a fine bear steak, you can get one at the foot of the slope. A grizzly dropped down from the upper regions late this

afternoon and we've been feeding off him ever since."

"Is the meat good yet?" asked Dick.

"I think so," replied Ben. "You can tell by bringing in a few slices and putting them over the coals to broil."

"As a rule," Dick went on, "I don't eat meat of any kind, but to-night I think I could handle a couple of steaks cut off a horse."

Without waiting for any more explanations the two men who had been called Steve and Joe hastened out to the carcass of the grizzly and soon returned with large slices of bear steak. Ben brought the broiler out of one of the tents and the men set to work cooking their suppers. They seemed rather handy at the task for city men.

While the steak was cooking, Ben made an extra large and extra strong supply of coffee and brought out tin dishes from the box where they kept their table furniture. The visitors eyed preparations for supper eagerly. Now and then one of them turned his eyes in the direction of the aeroplanes but made no comment.

"My, but that steak smells good!" exclaimed Dick. "I don't believe I can wait for it to cook through, Joe," he added, "so you just smoke up a piece, giving an imitation of a restaurant steak, and I'll eat it raw."

"It won't be long now," Joe answered with a laugh.

"Long?" repeated the other. "A quarter of a second seems longer to me now than all the time that has elapsed since Noah marched his menagerie out of the ark!"

"How long have you been in the valley?" asked Ben.

"All night, I think," Dick replied. "We saw the slope on the east and mistook it for the one at the foot of which our camp is situated. The farther we walked the farther the cliff looked to be. Honest," the man went on, with a whimsical smile, "I believe the cliff can travel faster than we can. Most remarkable country, this!"

Long before the steaks were thoroughly cooked the men fell to, eating like persons who had been deprived of food for many days.

"You're the second party of hungry men we met to-night," Ben said.

The three looked up instantly with something more than interest showing in their faces. Then, as if by common consent they turned toward the aeroplanes.

"Who are the others?" asked Dick.

"I don't know," replied Ben. "They were husky looking fellows who claimed to be mounted policemen. One of them killed the bear."

"Those are the fellows!" Dick exclaimed.

"You've seen them, have you?"

"Not to-day," Dick replied. "Yesterday, two men answering the description came to our camp and asked all sorts of questions about the object of our visit. They asked where we came from, and how long we were going to stay, and if we had seen other strangers in the mountains."

"Did they claim to belong to the mounted police?"

"They did not, but they appeared so everlastingly curious to know all about us that somehow I got the idea that they did belong to the Canadian force. They were hungry when they came to our camp, too."

"Did they say anything about aeroplanes?" asked Ben.

"Not a word! was the reply.

"And, look here," Dick observed, cutting an extra large piece of steak from the slice which lay on his plate, "I think I saw the camp-fire of our visitors to-night. It's up on the slope to the north."

"You don't suppose they're train robbers, do you?" asked Steve, rather excitedly. "I have heard," he continued, "that train robbers and other criminals come here to hide away from officers of the law."

"I've been guessing about them ever since they were here," Ben replied.

"If I thought they were train robbers," Dick

put in, "I'd take a jump for the nearest railroad without waiting for daylight! If you want to scare me stiff, just mention train robbers or grizzly bears! After those fellows left our tent yesterday, I was so frightened that I couldn't eat more than half a supper. Honest," he continued, "if I had seen this bear come tumbling down the slope, I would have let out a yell that would have alarmed the people at Spokane!"

"You're a great coward, if we leave it to you," laughed Joe.

Dick grunted and applied himself with greater energy to the bear steak.

After the men had eaten their fill Dick moved over to the machines. He stood for some moments by the *Ann* without touching her and then walked back to the fire. His companions looked at him inquiringly.

"That's a pretty good machine you have there," he said. "Did you bring it over the mountains?"

"Yes," answered Ben, "we brought in three aeroplanes. Two of our boys are out now with the third one."

"That's a fact," Dick exclaimed as the clamor of motors came through the still air. "And they're doing a pretty good job, flying in the night, at that! Looks as if they understood the game!"

The *Louise* lifted above the spot where the col-

ored lights had been displayed and whirled straight across the valley.

"What's she going off in that direction for?" asked Dick. "Did you notice that she came from the camp I mentioned a short time ago?"

"I did notice that," answered Ben, and I'm wondering why."

The *Louise* swept along at amazing speed and was soon lost to sight behind the summit to the west. Ben arose and entered the tent where Mr. Havens lay.

"You saw the *Louise?*" the boy asked.

"Are you sure that was the *Louise?*"

"There's no doubt of it," Ben replied. "The ordinary aeroplane doesn't carry a light like that. It's the *Louise,* all right, and I was wondering what the boys are going toward the coast for."

"I wish I knew that the boys are in charge of her," Mr. Havens said, after a moment's thought. "I'm always afraid something will happen when those boys get off together. If I hadn't walked all over those porcupines last night, I'd mount the *Ann* and make an investigation."

"If you think it's safe for you to remain here with these visitors," Ben suggested, "I'll go up in one of the machines and see what they're doing. I'm rather nervous over the matter myself."

"I heard the talk going on by the fire," the aviator explained, "and my impression is that these

men are all right. Still, it's rather a risky thing to do, to leave the camp and one machine in the custody of a man incapable of defending them."

"Perhaps we'd better wait a short time and see if the *Louise* doesn't return. I don't like to take chances," added Ben.

Presently the three visitors were invited into the tent where Mr. Havens lay and the four talked together for some minutes, then the aviator beckoned to Ben and whispered in his ear.

"I think it's all right for you to take the *Ann* out. These men seem to be honest fellows. They're from Chicago, and know as little about mountain work as a cat that has lived all its life in Gamblers' alley."

This was exactly according to Ben's inclinations, and the boy lost no time in getting the *Ann* ready for the air. The three visitors came out to assist, and when Ben took his seat Dick suggested significantly that he had never had the pleasure of riding in a flying machine.

"Jump in then," Ben said with a smile. "I'll show you how it seems to fly over mountains in the night."

At that moment the *Louise* lifted over the valley once more.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HOME OF THE FORTY THIEVES."

JIMMIE and Carl were now in a shallow wrinkle or gully which reached from the summit of the mountain to the shelf upon which the mysterious camp-fire had been seen. From their position they could not secure a view of their own camp, which was much lower down.

They could see the fire from which the mysterious signals had been given, and also the *Louise* winging her way toward them, but they could not see the *Ann* lifting under the stars. She was still much too low for that.

The increasing clatter of the approaching motors of the stolen machine, now not far away, effectually drowned the noise made by the *Ann*. In fact the sparking of the oncoming machine made conversation on the part of the boys rather difficult, obliging them to almost shout into each other's ears when conferring together.

It was decidedly uncomfortable for the boys in the gully. A chill wind blew down from the snow-

capped tops. They were glad that they had brought their warmest clothing, and only wished they had more of it.

"I wish we knew exactly where the fellows intend to land," Jimmie said as the boys paused in their progress toward the camp-fire.

"Yes," Carl answered, shouting until he was red in the face, "we ought to be right on the spot in order to give them an appropriate reception."

"They've got their nerve, anyway!" Jimmie exclaimed. "They steal our machine and then they bring it right back!"

"Perhaps they just borrowed it for a joy-ride!" chuckled Carl.

"These fellows don't look like joy-riders," Jimmie argued. "They look like men who are here for some definite purpose."

"They must think they've got us backed off the board," Carl suggested, "or they wouldn't think of bringing the machine back to the place from which they stole it."

The *Louise* came steadily on, flying rather close to the ground. As it came nearer the boys saw that the seats were occupied by three men.

"That accounts for their keeping in the heavy air next to the ground," Jimmie explained. "I don't believe they can make the summit with that load! They must have thrown off a lot of supplies in order to coax the old machine into carrying three."

The machine passed over the camp-fire and proceeded toward the summit, passing almost directly over the boys as they crouched down in the gully.

This gully was little better than a wrinkle on the slope of the mountain. It began at the summit and terminated at the shelf where the camp-fire had been built. At some distant day a great boulder or a glacier had started at the top and cut this trail to the shelf.

The sides of the gully were quite steep; in fact, almost perpendicular in places. Only at rare intervals were the walls in such shape as to render egress possible. Wherever the rocks were nearly perpendicular there were little shallow caves half-concealed under beetling crags.

It seemed an ideal place for unlawful operations, and the boys wondered, as they sat waiting for some indication of the purpose of the men in the machine, whether they had not come upon one of the resorts of men who make a business of smuggling whiskey across the border.

Presently the *Louise* disappeared from view, and in a short time following the vanishing of the lights the sparking of the motors ceased.

"It strikes me," Jimmie said, speaking lower now, "that the old machine has landed on the shelf where we left her. Now, what do you think the thieves mean by such conduct? I think if I stole

an aeroplane, or a cow, or a bulldog, I'd keep it away from the vicinity of the owner."

"Aw, they think they've got a couple of boys to deal with," Carl answered. "But they'll find we've got good automatics and know how to use them if they get gay with us."

"I'd like to go on a trip before I die," Jimmie grumbled, "where I wouldn't have to carry an automatic in my hand every minute of the time day and night! We butted into shooters in Mexico, in southern California, and in Peru, and now we've got into the game here."

"I don't like the automatic incidents myself," chuckled Carl. "Whenever I pick up a book, now, and catch the hero drawing a pistol and pointing with deliberate aim, I chuck the story into the garbage box."

The boys did not dare advance to the camp-fire, now, for should they do so their figures would be plainly discernible from the summit, to which the men from the *Louise* would undoubtedly make their way. Before long, exclamations of annoyance were heard far up the gully, and now and then a sharp, round light made its appearance.

"That's one of the electrics they stole from the *Louise!*" exclaimed Carl. "And they're coming down here, too," he went on, "right into this gully!"

"Yes," Jimmie answered, "and there are two

at the fire now, instead of one. Reckon the other must have been asleep."

"They're coming up the gully!" exclaimed Carl.

"And the others are coming down!"

"It's a blooming trap!" Carl cried. "They knew we'd make for the camp-fire when they stole our machine. They knew we'd be so cold on the shelf near the summit that we'd freeze to death if we didn't. So they waited until we got into the trap and started out from both ends to meet us. No wonder they brought the machine back to the old place with a combination like that working!"

"We might hide in one of these openings between the rocks," Jimmie suggested. "They probably know every one of 'em as well as we know every burr and bolt in the *Louise,* but even if they do it will take them a long time to find which one we're hiding in."

They could see the two men who had left the fire scrambling up the gully, still some distance away. The men who were coming down were faintly outlined against the brilliant sky, and occasionally against the white surface of the summit. This party was also some distance away.

The boys searched about industriously for a hiding-place, rejecting several breaks in the rocks as being too shallow, and finally came to a cavern which seemed to extend a considerable distance under the slope.

"I'd like to know what kind of a hole this is," Carl whispered as the two moved backward in absolute darkness.

"I brought my searchlight from the machine," Jimmie whispered back, "and when we get in a little farther, so the light won't be seen from outside, I'll turn it loose."

"You'd better do it now!" urged Carl. "When they get exactly in front they can see the light, no matter how much we try to shield it."

"That's a good idea, too!" Jimmie declared.

When the light was turned on it revealed a cavern at least twenty feet in width, extending back farther than the finger of light reached. The floor was level and smooth, apparently worn so by the passing of feet, and the walls held many shelves and openings, undoubtedly made by the hand of man.

"You see," Jimmie whispered, "we've struck a robbers' den, all right."

"Had we better go in farther?" asked Carl.

"Of course!" answered Jimmie. "We'll go in as far as we can. They'll search the place, of course, and probably capture us in the end, but we'll find out all we can about their nest before they get hold of us."

"That's a bet!" exclaimed Carl.

For a moment the boys argued as to whether they ought to visit the entrance before passing

farther in, in order to ascertain exactly what the others were doing, but they finally decided not to do so. Had they followed Jimmie's suggestion and looked out, they would have seen the *Ann* hovering over the valley just beyond the shelf where the camp-fire blazed.

The boys did not understand as they passed in why they were not followed by the others without loss of time. As the minutes passed and no lights or footsteps came from the entrance, they grew bolder and advanced by the light of the electric.

Had the boys known that the *Ann* was hovering over the scene they would have understood why their pursuers were too much interested to give them much of their attention at that time.

Perhaps fifty paces from the entrance the cavern was divided into two sections by a wall of rock which sprang up almost exactly in the center. The boys entered the one at the right and soon came upon a collection of barrels, casks and boxes.

"This must be the home of the Forty Thieves," chuckled Jimmie.

"Yes," Carl answered, "and we're likely to meet old Ali Baba at any minute! I wish we could put the old rascal into a stone jar and fill it with boiling oil," the boy added with a grin.

"I guess we'll be the boilees of anything of that kind takes place here to-night," Jimmie argued.

"They'll simply be red-headed when they find out that we've penetrated their treasure cave."

"We're always butting into something that makes our death desirable," complained Carl. "Don't you hear those fellows coming in?"

"I don't hear anything, do you?"

"Not a thing!"

"They don't have to come in here after us, anyway!" Jimmie argued. "They can just sit by the entrance with a little automatic and catch us when we get starved out!"

"Perhaps there's something in here in the way of provisions," suggested Carl. "If there is, it'll take them a long time to freeze us out. And while they're doing it, the boys will come up to investigate and get us out. Let's look and see what there is here."

Jimmie turned his electric on one of the casks and read the letters burned into the head.

"Whiskey!" he said turning up his nose in disgust.

"But they must have provisions here if they keep a bonded warehouse like this," urged Carl. "Let's keep looking."

A long search revealed nothing more substantial than whiskey, brandy and liquors of various kinds. The boys sat down on a barrel and discussed the situation soberly.

"What a snap this would be for some of the

hoboes we meet on the Bowery occasionally," snickered Carl, after the possibilities of escape had been thoroughly gone over. "You take a real native-born Boweryite and he'd feel insulted if you suggested that he ought to get out."

"Well, I don't see any sustenance in whiskey!" Jimmie answered, gloomily, "and I think we'd better be moving up toward the front in order to watch our chance to sneak out."

"Say," Carl suggested in a moment, "how'd you like to get another look at those husky fellows who contributed the bear to our supper?"

"I don't care about meeting them just at this time!" Jimmie replied.

"But see here," Carl continued. "You remember what Mr. Havens said about the two men who were seen at Colleton's office door in the Washington building. You remember the big fellow with the spinach on his map, don't you?"

"I remember what he said about him."

"Well, as has already been surmised, that big fellow is keeping company with Colleton. The man who got the inspector away from his desk is still keeping track of him, you may be sure of that!"

"And you think one of the men we saw at our camp may be the identical person, eh?" questioned Jimmie.

"Oh, it's only a guess," Carl answered, "but one

of them may be the man who got Colleton out of the building, just the same."

"We don't know that Colleton was taken out of the building by the big man!" declared Jimmie. "Ben insists that the slim man at the office door was Colleton, drugged and disguised, but it's no sure thing that he's right! I think he is, but he may be mistaken for all that!"

"Wouldn't it be a snap if we could seize one of those big fellows and have him turn out to be the right one? We'd take him down to the camp and put him through the third degree, and then he'd tell us where Colleton is hidden, and where the stolen proofs are, and who hired him to do the job, and a whole lot of other stuff calculated to put the mail-order thieves in bad with the jury."

"Wake up, boy, wake up!"

"Aw, let me dream. And then," he went on, "we could go to Washington and get the reward and bring it back to New York in bags and barrels——"

"Cut it out," whispered Jimmie. "There's some one moving just behind us! Wouldn't it be a joke on us if many of these barrels should contain brigands instead of brandy?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE VOYAGE OF THE ANN.

"I WOUDLDN'T call that much of a joke!" Carl replied. "Turn out the light and perhaps they won't see us!"

"What's the use?" the boy answered. "They've seen our light before this, and they've heard us talking."

"That's right, kiddo!" a voice said in the darkness. "We've seen your light and we've heard you talking. Now, if you'll lay your revolvers on the head of the barrel where you are standing, you'll save us mussing up the floor."

"You win!" exclaimed Jimmie.

The boys deposited their automatics on the barrel and stood waiting for the speaker to advance out of the darkness. When at last he made his appearance the boys noted that he was exactly the type of the man who had visited the camp on the previous day.

"We didn't expect company here to-night!" the fellow said, taking the electric from Jimmie's hand

and directing the circle of light on the boy's face. "Why didn't you send in your cards?"

"Wasn't any one to take them in!" grinned Carl.

The big fellow chuckled softly to himself and pointed to two casks not far away. Following the motion the boys seated themselves.

"Where are your machines?" was asked.

"Say," Jimmie broke in without answering the question. "Are you the man who shot the bear yesterday?"

"I'm the man who shot the bear!" was the reply.

"I thought so!" answered the boy.

"You didn't tell me where you left the machines," insisted the other.

Jimmie explained that two were at the camp and one somewhere near the peak unless the thieves had again removed it.

"What did you boys come over here for?" was the next question.

"To look up the red and green signals."

The captor laughed softly to himself for a moment and then asked:

"Did you look them up?"

"We didn't get a chance!" was the reply.

"What did you come into the country for?" asked the captor.

"To have a good time hunting."

"You said something like that yesterday," the man continued, "but I didn't believe it! I've less reason to believe in the truth of it now! Boys out on hunting trips don't travel in expensive aeroplanes, nor do they wander about in the night, trying to read signals not intended for them to understand. You'll have to come again, boys!" he added.

"That's all there is to it!" Jimmie returned. "We came here hunting."

"For smuggled goods?" asked the other with a laugh.

"Never heard of smuggled goods in this section of the country!"

"I'm sorry you blundered in here, lads," the man said, after a short silence. "You've made us a lot of trouble. We've got to do one of two things. Either get rid of you boys for good and all, or change our entire system of operation."

"I should advise the change!" grinned Jimmie.

"Look here!" Carl demanded whimsically, resolved to mislead the man if it were possible to do so, "can you give us a line on a country where there's nothing but mountains and rivers and blue sky? This is the fourth mountain trip we've made, and every time we've run into a lot of people where none were supposed to exist."

"That's right!" Jimmie cut in. "When we landed in the valley we thought we'd have the whole place to ourselves. Then you come along and rolled

the bear down on us, and asked a lot of impertinent questions. Then three men steal our aeroplane so we can't return to camp from our midnight joy-ride. Then we see two men in front of a fire and hear others coming down the gully. How many people are there around here, anyway?"

"Quite a few!" laughed the captor. "In fact," he went on, "I don't think you can find any spot on the American continent where you won't find more or less human beings."

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Carl.

"Tell you what," Jimmie cut in before the man could answer the question, "if you'll get the *Louise* away from the thieves and go back to camp with us, we'll cook you the biggest bear steak you ever saw, and cook you a cup of coffee that will hold up an iron wedge!"

"If you only hadn't entered this storehouse," the man said thoughtfully, "your proposition might be worthy of consideration."

"We'll never say a word about the smuggled goods," said Carl.

The man seemed inclined to consider this statement, but in a moment the two figures who had been seen before the fire came into the cavern on a run. They conferred with the big fellow for a few moments and then went out.

"Now, boys," said the man, who appeared to be

custodian of the cavern, "there's trouble outside, and we've got to take you into the other arm of the cavern and make sure that you don't get away from us."

"I don't know who could be making you trouble," Jimmie retorted. "You mounted police fellows seem to have everything your own way up in this country. Only," he went on with a whimsical smile, "I never knew that mounted policemen stood guard over caves full of smuggled whiskey."

"That story about being mounted policemen did sound rather thin, didn't it?" asked the fellow.

"It was too thin for us to take stock in," replied Carl.

"Well, come on, boys!" the captor said. "We may as well be moving back to your private suite. You'll be well taken care of for the next few days. You fed me well and I'll feed you well!"

"Are our friends outside?" asked Jimmie.

"That's just it!" cried Carl. "I thought a short time ago that I heard the motors of the *Ann.*"

"The sparking you heard probably came from the *Louise,*" suggested the man. "All motors sing the same song.

"Not much!" exclaimed Carl. "I can recognize the song of the *Ann* as far as I can hear it!"

"Well, come on!" the man exclaimed rather gruffly, "I've got to get you boys out of sight!

You'll be safer farther in, anyway, for there may be shooting. I'll see you a little later on."

The boys were conducted to a low, tunnel-like place leading out of the south arm of the cavern. It was not a desirable apartment, by any means, but the boys stepped inside without expressing the disgust they felt. The walls were damp as if underground springs existed not far away.

"Now," the big fellow said, "I'm going to leave a man here to guard you boys. You'll find he's a pretty good sort of a chap, if you don't try any funny business with him. If you try to get away, you'll probably make the acquaintance of a clip of bullets!"

The guard referred to made his appearance in a moment. The boys saw little except his face by the flashlight, and they were not at all pleased with that. He motioned them farther back and sat down at the entrance.

"Cripes!" whispered Jimmie. "He looks like he'd been eating something that had caused a misery in his tummy!"

"Looks mad enough to bite nails!" agreed Carl.

The guard, sitting with the finger of light from the electric pointing down the passage, turned it for an instant on the boys' faces and favored them with a most malignant scowl.

"Keep still, now, you fellows," he demanded.

"All right," laughed Jimmie, "we'll be good!"

"I know what's the matter with that fellow!" Carl declared in a moment. "He's got a hang-over! He was probably spiflicated last night, and he'll be picking bumble-bees out of the wall in a minute if he don't get a couple of drinks. Do you see anything significant in that, kid?" he added giving his chum a nudge with his elbow.

"He's a tank, all right!" Jimmie agreed. "And he'll be looking for the joy water in about ten minutes. When he gets good and gay, we'll make a sneak! What do you think of our being down here in a hole like this, anyhow, when we came out to ride on flying machines?" the boy added, in a tone of disgust. "It's just rotten, that's what it is!"

"And we'll get the razzle-dazzle from Ben, too!" complained Carl.

"Do you really think it was the *Ann's* motors you heard?" asked Jimmie, in a moment. "If the boys are up in the machine, they ought to soon find out what's going on here."

"If Ben is up in the machine, you mean. Mr. Havens isn't able to take a trip in the air and won't be for several days."

"That's a fact," Jimmie answered gravely, "and I'm afraid Ben can't do very much alone."

In ten minutes the boys heard footsteps proceeding stealthily down the cavern. The searchlight still showed at the entrance to the dungeon-like

place where the boys sat, but Jimmie seemed to think its round eye remained too steadily on one point.

"Look here," he said in a whisper to Carl, "this lovely guard of ours has propped up the electric so as to make us think he's holding it and gone out after some of the funny stuff in the barrels!"

"Then we don't need any one to tell us what to do!" Carl answered.

The boys moved forward and looked out into the passage. The electric was propped against the wall and the retreating figure of the guard could be seen at the point where the cavern was divided by the wall of rock.

"Put out the light and we'll sneak along!" whispered Carl.

"Nix!" answered Jimmie. "We've got to let it burn until he turns into the passage where the whiskey is. If he sees there's no light where he left one, he'll come chasing back on the run."

Directly the man turned into the north passage and then Jimmie shut off the light. Together the boys moved softly toward the entrance. They passed the junction of the two corridors with extreme caution for they had no means of knowing how far into the interior the guard had wandered.

When they came nearer to the entrance they saw a mist of daylight. They moved faster now, for they knew very well that their figures were out-

lined against the dawn. Should the guard suddenly make his appearance he would not need to travel back to the dungeon in order to inform himself of their escape.

"Do you hear the motors of the *Ann* now?" whispered Jimmie.

"Not a sound!" was the answer.

"If we only had our automatics," Jimmie wailed, "we could step out into the gully with some confidence."

"I don't believe there's any one out there!" declared Carl.

The boys, however, were not permitted to remain long in doubt as to the situation in the gully outside the cavern. While they waited the guard came running down the cavern shooting wildly as he advanced.

"Me for daylight!" shouted Jimmie.

When the lads reached the gully, they saw the *Ann* hovering over the mountainside. Her planes glistened in the sunlight, and she seemed to the anxious boys to represent everything that was desirable, freedom, breakfast, and the chance to sleep!

While they looked, however, the aeroplane shot away toward the valley. A moment later the *Louise* rose over the summit to the east and followed.

The report of a revolver brought the boys' eyes

back to earth again and they saw three men rushing down the gully toward the camp-fire, which still blazed dimly in the light of the morning sun. As they came nearer to the boys, they leveled their weapons as if determined to prevent further escape. Then additional shots came from somewhere. The boys hardly realized the exact location of the shooters, and two of the men crumpled down and rolled along the bottom of the gully.

The third man threw up his hands and faced about. The two aeroplanes again circled over the gully and the boys saw Ben looking down from the seat of the *Ann*. They could not distinguish the face or figure of the aviator on the *Louise* for she was now making for the summit.

What followed took place so unexpectedly and with such rapidity that the boys hardly knew what was going on until three men sprang out of a shallow depression on the east side of the gully and moved toward the burly fellow who had been their captor a short time before.

They saw one of the men slip a pair of handcuffs over the wrists of the man they had talked with in the whiskey cavern and point toward the summit, over which the aeroplanes were now moving.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED HAPPENING.

"HIT me a clip on the wrist and wake me up!" exclaimed Jimmie.

The three men were entire strangers to the boys, and yet they appeared to be friendly. They had expected only hostile meetings in the gully. The men smiled at the evident surprise of the boys and pushed the burly prisoner on in advance.

"Who rubbed the lamp?" asked Carl, as he clambered laboriously up toward the summit. "I never saw anything exactly like this!"

"Say, Mr. Policeman," Jimmie called out to a man in citizen's dress whose smutty face disclosed a week's growth of beard, "me friend here wants to know who rubbed the lamp for this last scene."

"You'll find out when you get to the top of the summit," replied the other. "You'll find friends up there!"

"This comes out of a dream-book, all right!" Jimmie declared.

"Say," Carl exclaimed, "can't we go back into

the cavern and get our automatics? They're perfectly good guns!"

"I've got your guns, boys!" said the prisoner. "I thought I might get a chance to use them, but it seems I didn't. I didn't expect to meet Dick Sherman in this neck of the woods."

"Dick Sherman?" repeated Jimmie.

"Is that the Canadian revenue officer we've heard so much about?" asked Carl. "I wouldn't mind meeting Dick Sherman."

"Well, there he is!" snarled the prisoner pointing to the man who had spoken to the boys before, the man who had so used his imagination at the camp sometime before!

The party toiled on up the gully until they reached the snowy summit. Off to the east they saw the great planes of the *Ann* tilting in the morning sunlight. Just beyond her, and veering to the south, raced the *Louise*. While the three men started down the declivity with their prisoner the boys stood at the cold summit and watched the two machines.

"That's a race all right!" Jimmie exclaimed.

"Of course!" answered Carl. "Ben is chasing up the fellow who stole the *Louise*. I'd just like to know how the kid got wise to the fact that we needed help, and how these three men happened to come here just in the nick of time."

"I presume it will all be explained before many

hours," Jimmie answered. "What I'm most interested in now is this race. Suppose Ben catches the *Louise*. How's he going to get the machine down without shooting the aviator? And that wouldn't be good for the machine!"

"He's got some scheme on foot," Carl answered. "Just watch him whirl around the *Louise*. There! Now, don't you see he's got the other aviator buffaloed? I'll bet he's holding a gun on him!"

The two machines came back side by side. The *Ann* landed on the ledge and the two boys were hustled into the seat by the side of their chum who sat grinning at their bewildered faces.

Before they could ask any questions the *Ann* shot away and in an incredibly short space of time Jimmie and Carl were landed by their own fire!

"Get a move on, now!" Ben cried, as he again sprang into the seat of the aeroplane. "Mr. Havens will be wanting breakfast, and I've got a date with Dick Sherman!"

The boys stood watching the *Ann* lift into the air and make toward the summit. Their faces expressed both wonder and impatience.

"Now, what do you think of that?" demanded Jimmie.

"This is one of the mysteries you read about in books but never see in real life!" laughed Carl. "I wish we'd choked the story out of Ben. He's laughing in his sleeve this minute, I know he is!"

"Boys!" Mr. Havens called from the tent.

Jimmie and Carl hastened forward and looked in.

"Perhaps you can tell us what's been going on here?" asked Jimmie.

"If you'll go and fix up a big breakfast, I'll tell you all about it!" laughed the millionaire.

"We'll cook you some steak," replied Carl, "and make you some coffee."

"I think," smiled the millionaire, "that you'd better bury that bear."

The boys made an onslaught on the store boxes, which had been brought from the aeroplanes to the vicinity of the fire, and soon had ham and eggs frying over the ruddy coals. Potatoes were boiling in a great kettle before many minutes, and coffee was bubbling not far away.

Jimmie snatched a loaf of bread from the box and began eating, while Carl opened a tin of pork and beans and began searching for a spoon.

"Hungry, boys?" asked Mr. Havens.

"Hungry?" repeated Jimmie. "We've been frozen to death, and shot to death, and held captive in a mountain dungeon, and had several other disagreeable things happen to us, but the worst of the whole business is that we haven't had anything to eat since last night!"

"Tell us what's been going on," requested Carl.

"After you went away," Mr. Havens began,

" three men came into camp declaring that they had been lost in the mountains. Ben prepared supper for them and then proposed going out after the *Louise*. At the last moment one of the men sprang into the seat beside him and they went away together.

" The next I knew Ben came swinging back in the *Ann* alone. He talked with the two men who had been left here for a moment and then they all went away together, flying like mad in the aeroplane."

" Didn't Ben explain the situation to you? " asked Jimmie.

" He said that the three men who had represented themselves as hunters lost in the hills were Canadian revenue officers in search of smuggled whiskey, and that their leader, the man who had gone away with him, was the famous Dick Sherman.

" He said, too, that Sherman had discovered a nest of outlaws and a cavern which he believed to be the store-house of the gang. At that time we knew little regarding the whereabouts of the two rattle-brained boys who had gone away in the *Louise*."

" They stole it while we were watching the campfire," Jimmie explained in a hesitating way.

" What's Ben gone back for, now? " asked Carl.

" I suspect from what he said to me," laughed

Mr. Havens, "that he's gone back after the revenue officers and the prisoners."

"Then perhaps I'd better be getting more breakfast ready," suggested Carl. "We'll be running a hotel next, just like we always do when we get out into the mountains."

In less than an hour the *Ann* and *Louise* lay on level ground near the fire, two prisoners sat handcuffed together not far away, and the three revenue officers were enjoying a plentiful breakfast supplied by the lads. Ben and Jimmie sat with Mr. Havens in his tent.

"There goes my dream!" exclaimed Ben pointing to the two prisoners.

"I don't understand," said Mr. Havens.

"Why, I had it all doped out that the men Dick Sherman captured were the men who abducted Colleton."

"That's just the way I had it figured!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"And now they turn out to be just whiskey smugglers!" exclaimed Ben in disgust. "They probably never saw Washington, nor heard of Colleton, nor even read one of the lying advertisements of the Kuro company."

"We've been through a rotten bad night," Jimmie agreed, "without getting anywhere! Say, Ben," he added, "how did you induce the aviator

on the *Louise* to swing back to the landing and give himself up?"

"I got the drop on him!" laughed Ben.

"But didn't he have just as good a chance to get the drop on you?"

"He emptied his automatic before I did mine," was the modest reply.

"Did you look after the men who were shot in the gulch?" Carl inquired in a moment.

"When I made the last trip," Ben explained, "I found a drunken man sitting by the fire. He said the men were dead and that he would give them burial."

"What's this Sherman fellow going to do now?" asked Jimmie.

"He's going to try to get this smuggled whiskey into a government warehouse somewhere," answered Mr. Havens. "I don't know just how he'll do it, but it's got to be done."

"What do we get out of it?" asked Jimmie.

"You're the merry little savings bank boy!" laughed Ben.

"I didn't mean money!" retorted Jimmie scornfully. "What I meant was how does all this smuggled whiskey business help us find this post-office inspector?"

"It doesn't," replied Ben. "Ask something hard."

"You don't know that yet," advised Mr. Havens.

"Come to think of it, of course we don't!" cried Ben. "The abductors would be apt to bring Colleton into just such a hole as this, wouldn't they? The outlaws would, in a measure, protect them from hunters, who are said to give a wide berth to any region known to contain outlaws."

"Well," Jimmie cut in in a moment, "I'm going to go and get Carl, and romp merrily off to the hay. We didn't have any sleep last night and I guess we can get in a few lines of slumber to pretty good purpose."

"Then you'll be ready for another crazy midnight trip," smiled Ben.

"I guess it wasn't so very crazy after all," replied Jimmie. "If we hadn't gone out to look into those signals, the smugglers wouldn't have been captured."

"Have it your own way," laughed Ben.

Jimmie and Carl went away to the other tent and were soon sound asleep. When they lay down the camp-fire was surrounded by the revenue officers and prisoners. Ben was making arrangements to sleep on a roll of blankets in the Havens' tent. When they awoke, twilight was settling over the valley and Ben was rolling them about on their blankets.

"Get up!" the boy said. "You've slept all day!"

Jimmie sat up and rubbed his eyes. Carl aimed

a kick at the boy who had aroused him and then lay back on the blankets.

"Where are the others?" asked Jimmie tumbling out of the tent.

"They went away in the machines," answered Ben.

"You never let them take the *Ann* and the *Louise!*" almost shouted Jimmie. "They'll be sure to break 'em!"

"Don't get excited, now," laughed Ben. "I took them over the ridge in the *Ann* and came back more than an hour ago. Since then I've been getting supper and helping Mr. Havens fix up his porcupine feet."

"Can he walk yet?" asked Jimmie sleepily.

"He won't be able to walk for a week!" was the reply.

"Say," Jimmie said to Ben in a moment, as they approached the fire, "did you see that pirate with the package when you went back after the prisoners?"

"Of course, I saw him!" answered Ben.

"What was he talking about?"

"I don't know what he was trying to say," replied Ben, "but I got the impression that before long he would be umpiring a fight between a green rattlesnake and a pink lion with a red tail."

"It's a wonder this Dick Sheman left him there alone with all that whiskey," commented Jimmie.

"If he had my disposition, he'd set fire to the whole bunch of it!"

"Sherman won him over to the side of law and order," laughed Ben, "by promising him immunity and a position in the government service. He'll be there when they come back for the whiskey, all right. Sherman seemed to know something about the fellow. At least, he told me that Crooked Terry, as they call him, has been in crooked games all his life. He told me, too, that the old fellow knows this country better than any person in the world. He's got a map of it in his head."

"That's just what I wanted to know!" cried Jimmie. "If you don't mind, Ben," he added with a sly wink, "we'll go up there to-night and get a copy of that map! I'll just bet you," he went on, "that our little scrap with the smugglers will get us somewhere in the game we're playing, after all! What do you think about it?"

"That seems to me to be the very thing to do!" replied Ben. "If Crooked Terry knows all about this country, he's the man we've got to do business with. If we find Colleton, we've got to know where to look!"

CHAPTER XI.

JIMMIE OPENS HIS DREAM-BOOK.

"Now, don't be too sure about finding Colleton in British Columbia," Mr. Havens warned, when the boys consulted him regarding the point they had been discussing. "We are out here on the faintest kind of a hint, and it is just possible that the hint was contributed by friends of the mail-order people in order to draw our attention from the real point of interest. Such things are often done."

"I don't believe the secret service department would send us on such a journey because of a mere hint," Ben argued. "There's something back of it all that we don't know anything about!"

"I have an idea that we know nearly as much as the department does," smiled Mr. Havens, "except in one regard. We don't know where the hint came from and they do. We never shall know!"

"Is there a record anywhere which shows how the two men were dressed? Meaning, of course, the two men who were seen in the corridor in front of Colleton's door?" asked Ben.

"One of the girls working at a desk not far from the door is on record as saying that the heavy man was dressed entirely in brown, including hat and gaiters, and that the slender man was dressed in a sporty coat with large checks, and a pocket or roller felt hat. He wore a wing collar, a hard-bosomed shirt, and a red necktie."

"Quite a sporty looking guy!" laughed Jimmie.

"Did any one ever see Colleton dressed like that?" asked Ben.

"Colleton was very particular about his wardrobe," replied Mr. Havens. "On the day in question, he wore a neat suit of blue serge, a new derby hat, and a soft silk shirt with a Byronic collar. His tie was a mixture of white and blue. Half a dozen girls remembered exactly how he looked as he stepped into his office that morning."

"Now, look here," Ben chuckled, "if Colleton was to be abducted, and a man was to do the disguise stunt for him, wouldn't the villain of the play attempt to make the disguise a strong contrast to the usual dress of the victim? Colleton was quiet and refined in his dress, as you describe it, and it seems to me that a disguise intended for him would naturally partake of the sporty style."

"That's good argument, Ben!" Mr. Havens answered.

"That's only plain common-sense," laughed the boy.

"Gee!" exclaimed Jimmie, turning to Ben. "I'm going to write a detective story about you some day, and have it printed in one of the leading magazines on the back page next to the soap advertisements!"

"Now, here's another point," Ben went on. "The man who went to Colleton's room that day to take him away carried the articles he used in disguising the man there with him. Now, here's the question: What was done with the coat, and hat, and shirt, and tie usually worn by Colleton?"

"That's easy!" Jimmie laughed. "The villain carried the coat and hat away with him, and put on a starched shirt or a dickey over the silk one. The correct course for the fellow to take would be to fasten a dickey around Colleton's neck, showing a false front, a wing collar, and a red tie. That would be the easiest way to do the job!"

"Go on!" laughed the millionaire. "I like to hear you boys talk."

"Now, what I want to know is this," Ben went on, "has any effort been made to find the coat and hat Colleton wore that morning?"

"I don't think so," replied Mr. Havens. "It is my opinion, however," the aviator went on, "that the villain, as you call him, would take the coat and hat with him."

"Did he carry a hand-bag when seen at the door?" asked Jimmie.

"Come to think of it, he did not!" was the reply.

"There you are!" exclaimed Ben. "You've all regarded my theory of the case as possible, but imaginative. Now, let me ask you a question, Mr. Havens. If the coat and hat should be found in or about that room in the post-office building the finding would establish our theory of the case, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would!" was the answer.

"Well, then," Ben continued, "I want you to find out at the earliest possible moment whether the coat and hat are hidden in that apartment."

"They might have been thrown out of the window!" suggested Jimmie.

"Hardly," Mr. Havens suggested. "Colleton had an inside room. Anything thrown out of his window would land on the skylight which arches over the mail division on the ground floor. The coat and hat would have been discovered within five minutes, and even if they chanced to be overlooked during that day, they would have been discovered by the sweepers the next morning."

"That's just what I wanted to know!" Ben laughed.

"Now, if the garments are not in the room, they must have been carried away!" Jimmie cut in. "Perhaps the villain put them under his clothes. That's an old trick with criminals."

"Just one more question," Ben began as Mr. Havens nodded for him to proceed. "How did the villain get the papers out of the locked drawer of the desk and the closed safe?"

"That's another mystery," Mr. Havens continued.

"Don't you think he buffaloed Colleton after he drugged him and forced him to open the safe and the desk and take the papers out?"

"That is very probable," was the reply.

"In that case," Ben went on, "where would the villain naturally throw the coat and hat?"

"In the safe!" shouted Jimmie springing to his feet. "Has the safe been opened yet, Mr. Havens?" the boy continued.

"An expert was at work on it when I left New York," was the reply.

"Well, when they get it open," Ben asserted confidently, "they'll find Colleton's hat and coat inside."

"Say, but it's easy to solve this case as long as we establish all the facts to suit ourselves!" laughed Jimmie.

"I believe this little thinking machine," said Mr. Havens nodding to Ben, "really has the right view of it!"

"He thinks so, too," grinned Jimmie wrinkling his freckled nose.

"Yes, and so do you!" declared Ben.

"If you know all about the case, then," Jimmie went on, "why don't you tell us how this burly ruffian got Colleton out of Washington? Mr. Havens says the alarm was given within half an hour of the disappearance of the inspector. It seems to me that the cops might have dragged in a hundred sporty looking men with red neckties and slouch hats for the inspector's friends to look over for the purpose of identification."

"If you talk with the Washington officials to-night," Mr. Havens said, "they will insist that the two men who were seen at the door of Mr. Colleton's room had nothing to do with the disappearance of the inspector."

"Has the theory ever been advanced that the thin, doped-looking fellow might have been Colleton?" asked Ben.

"Not until advanced by you that I know of!"

"So they didn't look for the man in the sporty coat and red tie?"

"I am certain that they did not."

"Well," reiterated Ben, "when they find him, they'll find Colleton!"

"Now, go on and tell us how they got the inspector out of Washington," said Jimmie, with a provoking wink in the direction of Mr. Havens.

"You can answer that question yourself, Jimmie," replied Ben.

"Of course I can!" answered the boy. "They

had a taxi at the Eleventh street entrance with a man inside. From the building they drove directly to the Union station. There they took a stateroom for Frisco. I don't know what time the train left, because I haven't got any railroad time-table in my dream-book, but I can tell you what they did after they got to the depot," he added with a sly wink at the millionaire.

"Go to it!" laughed Ben. "This beats the Arabian Nights!"

"When they got to the depot they found the stateroom already engaged on a train leaving that night for the Pacific coast. They stripped the inspector, put him in pajamas and tucked him into bed."

"What'd they do that for?" asked Ben.

"So they could tell the porter not to be intruding into the room and waking a sick man!" said Jimmie. "So they could give a good excuse for having meals sent in to the inspector."

"Go on," grinned Ben, "turn another page of your dream-book and see what you find there."

"On the way across the continent," Jimmie chuckled, "they kept the inspector under the influence of dope sixteen hours and a half out of the twenty-four. The other seven hours and a half they devoted to the third degree. You see, the spirit of the little Indian maiden which now controls me," the boy grinned, "whispers in my ear

that they offered him a good many thousand dollars if he'd quit the game."

"Jimmie," Ben said with a superior look, "if you keep on exercising your imagination you're likely to bring up in the back room on the top floor of the foolish house!"

"All right!" laughed Jimmie. "You just see if they didn't get him out of Washington in that way!"

"Suppose you look in your dream-book again," smiled Mr. Havens, "and tell us what became of the sporty coat, the dickey and red tie, and also the slouch hat. Also the beard! The slender man wore a beard!"

"I don't have to look in the dream-book to find that," replied the boy. "The villains dumped the stuff into the first river they came to."

"There's been nothing like this since The Sign of the Four was written," laughed Mr. Havens. "You boys would consider yourselves abused if it should be discovered that Colleton disguised himself and disappeared because he had decided, for financial reasons, not to appear against the mail-order people."

"Sure we would!" declared Jimmie.

"Or if it should be discovered that he walked out of his office unattended that day and was abducted from the buffet of the Raleigh Hotel. That would twist your theory some, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, yes," laughed Jimmie. "If a shovel-nosed pike from the Potomac river should crawl into a back yard and set up life as a hen, that would be remarkable, too, wouldn't it?"

"That's right!" Mr. Havens advised. "Stick to your theories. I half believe they are right!"

"Now, about this proposed visit to Crooked Terry," asked Jimmie. "Do you think we'd better take the *Louise* out and have a talk with him tonight?"

"Keep on, Jimmie!" Ben grinned. "You've landed Colleton in a stateroom on the Pacific coast, so what's the use of looking for him in a smugglers' den on the Continental Divide?"

"I didn't say what they did with him after they got him to the coast!" Jimmie replied. "My private opinion is that they brought him up here and hid him! They wouldn't check him for safe-keeping with the smugglers, would they? Of course they wouldn't, but Crooked Terry might know of some likely hiding-place in this section!"

"It won't do any harm to go and talk with the fellow, anyhow," Ben suggested. "We can fly up there to the camp, get what information he possesses and be back in a couple of hours."

Leaving Carl to his slumbers, the boys prepared a hasty supper for themselves and Mr. Havens and started away in the *Louise*.

The night was clear and they had no difficulty

in making their way to the landing which they had discovered on the previous night.

"I don't think we ought to leave this machine alone," Ben said as he alighted. "Why don't you go up again and fly about until I signal with my electric for you to come down?" he asked Jimmie.

"I'd like to talk with this old boozer," Jimmie argued.

"Well, one must stay with the machine!" Ben insisted. "If it's all the same to you, I'll talk with this Crooked Terry and you come down when I signal."

"You're on!" declared the boy. "I'll fly over the summit and watch you rolling down the gully."

When Ben reached the place where the fire had blazed on the previous night, he was surprised to see a bed of coals remaining. Drawing nearer, and flashing his light he saw a well-dressed young man lying unconscious on the shelf, his silk hat scorching on the embers, and a small traveling-bag blistering under the heat. Over the figure, knife in hand, stood Terry.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENGLISHMAN'S BAG.

Terry lifted the hand holding the knife as Ben approached. Doubting if the drunken man would heed his words, and realizing that it would be impossible to reach his side in time to prevent the meditated crime, the boy fired at the uplifted arm. Instead of finding a lodging in flesh and muscle the bullet struck the blade of the knife and broke it off short at the handle.

His hand and arm temporarily paralyzed by the force of the impact, Terry caught hold of his wrist with his left hand and looked about with a snarl on his bloated face.

When Ben stepped within the circle of light about the fire he drew back still, clutching his benumbed wrist.

"What'd you do that for?" he demanded.

"I didn't want you to kill the man," replied Ben. "Who is he, and where did he come from?"

"He butted in!" answered Terry shortly. "He wanted to take my provisions and my drink by

force. He was too fresh, and I knocked him down. I guess he isn't hurt much."

"How'd he get here?" asked Ben.

"I don't know, and I don't care!" was the sullen reply. "I might ask the same about you. What do you want here, anyway?"

"Dick Sherman sent me!" was the reply.

"All right," answered the other. "I know Dick Sherman. He's good people! Why didn't he come himself?"

"He'll be here to-morrow," replied Ben, drawing slightly on his imagination. "He'll tell you all about it then."

Ben was angry at the impertinent manner of the fellow, but he understood that he was there to placate him if possible, so he refrained from further conversation at that time. Turning to the man lying by the fire, he lifted him in his arms and carried him to a more comfortable position.

"If you'll fetch me some whiskey," he said, "I'll bring this man back to life. I guess the fellow needs something to eat more than anything else!"

Grumbling that he had no liquor to give away, Terry reluctantly produced a flask from his pocket, and Ben applied the same to the mouth of the unconscious man. He opened his eyes and tried to sit up as the fiery liquid scorched his throat.

"I say, don't do that, you know!" he gasped.

"That's for your own good!" Ben chuckled.

"But, I say, you know, the blawsted thing is burning clear down to me boots, don't ye know!"

"I'm glad of that," Ben grinned. "It seems to be having the desired effect! How'd you like to have something to eat about now?"

"I'm that hungry," was the answer, "that I could eat a cat, don't ye know! I've been long without food or drink."

Ben turned to Terry to ask if anything in the line of provisions could be had there, but the fellow was seen wandering off in the direction of the cavern. After assisting the stranger to an easier position, Ben followed on after the guardian of the smuggled goods.

When he reached the cavern he found Terry lying flat on his face an empty whiskey flask in his hand. Kicks and cuffs did no good whatever, so the boy was obliged to leave him there to sleep off his debauch. When he went back to the fire he found the stranger retrieving his silk hat and hand-bag. He appeared much annoyed at the condition of both!

"The bloomin' idiot!" he cried, "burned me luggage and mutilated me hat! Do you happen to know," he went on with a pleading expression, "how one can get out of this blawsted country?"

"If you can walk about half a mile up and down hill," Ben returned, "I can take you out in a flying machine."

The stranger eyed Ben dubiously.

"You're a school-boy," he said. "You can't run a flying machine!"

"Do you want to go?" asked Ben impatiently.

The stranger admitted that he wanted to go, but still expressed doubts as to Ben's ability to handle an aeroplane.

"All right, stay here if you want to," Ben said. "But perhaps you'd better tell me your name so I can make a report to your friends if I'm asked any questions."

"My name," answered the other, "is Claude Mercer DuBois, and I'm from London, England. I came to this blawsted country after big game and I've been made game of myself."

"Well, Claude Mercer DuBois," Ben went on with a grin, "if you want to get down to camp where you can get plenty to eat and drink, you'd better be hiking toward the machine. I came up here to talk with Terry, but he's pickled and I can't get any satisfaction out of him so I'll have to come back some other time."

It took a long time for Claude Mercer DuBois to climb the steep gully, wade through the snow on the summit, and pass down to the landing where the *Louise* was expected to pick the two up. The journey was completed at length, however, and soon Ben saw the aeroplane off to the south. He signaled with his electric and directly the machine

dropped down almost at the feet of the disgusted Englishman.

"I say," he said, "this is quite remarkable, you know. Here I find school-boys running machines our army officers fail to handle."

"We do a good many things on this side of the pond," laughed Ben, "which you Englishmen will never be able to accomplish!"

"If you want to get down to our camp, hop in," Jimmie urged.

As the Englishman took his seat, Jimmie leaned over and whispered in the ear of his chum:

"Where did you find it, and what are you going to do with it?"

"Just at present," Ben answered, "I'm a life saving station. I'm taking this fellow down where he can get something to eat and drink. There's no telling how long he's been wandering about the mountains, but there's no doubt that he's about all in!"

Ben handed DuBois his bag and climbed into the seat with Jimmie. When the machine was well under way, cutting the freezing air of the mountain-top like a knife, the Englishman began begging to be lowered to the earth. He actually trembled every time the machine tipped in a current of air. Once or twice Ben steadied him with his hand.

"Let me out!" DuBois pleaded, his voice rising shrill above the din of the motors. "If I fall when

I'm walking, don't you know," he went on, "I'm there on the ground, but if I fall when I'm riding on one of these blawsted airships, I'm there in the ground, don't you know!"

"You'll be all right as soon as you get your second wind!" exclaimed Ben. "It's always a little shock at first!"

"Me second wind?" demanded the Englishman. "I got more than me second wind climbing the slope when I saw the embers of the fire you picked me out of."

"Well, you'll soon be at the camp," Ben consoled, "and then you can tell us the story of your life if you want to."

Carl and Mr. Havens were rather astonished at seeing the boys return with another stranger, a man who appeared to be both weak and discouraged.

"Now, I wonder what bush they picked that off from?" asked Carl as DuBois almost fell out of the seat. "Looks to me like they went and picked it before it was ripe."

"I never saw anything like it," replied Mr. Havens. "You boys find strangers at every turn of the road. You'll go above clouds some day and find a couple of boys sitting on a fog bank!"

"Come, get a move on, here!" cried Ben, giving DuBois a seat on a blanket by the fire. "My friend is hungry and wants a few dozen eggs and about a quart of coffee!"

As Ben spoke he lifted the hand-bag from the place where it had fallen and started toward the tent with it.

"Here, you cawn't take that away, don't you know," DuBois exclaimed. "That's me luggage!"

"All right, wear it for a watch-charm if you want to," Ben declared, throwing the hand-bag down by the Englishman's side.

In the meantime Jimmie and Carl busied themselves preparing a meal for the wanderer. When it was quite ready he insisted on going to the stream which ran through the valley not far away and bathing his hands and face in the clear water. When he returned he took the key to the hand-bag from his pocket and threw back the bolt.

"There's a bawth towel in here," he said in a moment, "and I'll be obliged to use it until I get to me boxes, don't ye know! Do you think," he went on with a wistful look, "that we'll soon come to a place where I can get me morning tub?"

"You can get a tub in the brook!" laughed Jimmie. "There's plenty of rattlesnakes and lizards along the edges of the stream, but after you get out into the middle you won't find anything more dangerous than alligators!"

"Don't ye know," grinned the Englishman, "I think you're spoofing me!"

"He's great fun, ain't he?" whispered Jimmie, as DuBois shot back the bolt and opened his hand-

bag. He took out first a comb, a brush, and a hand mirror. Then followed a bath towel of goodly size.

"And me 'andkerchiefs," mused the Englishman. "I don't see anything of the blawsted 'andkerchiefs!"

He kept digging away at the hand-bag, drawing out one article after another, until at last he came to a garment which brought something more than surprise and excitement to the faces of the boys. It was a sporty sack coat, the pattern being according to latest Bowery cut, the material coarse, and the markings of the cloth loud in the extreme.

DuBois poked the coat over and over on the ground with one disdainful finger. He seemed surprised at finding it in his bag.

"Now, where did you come from?" he asked, addressing the garment.

"Holy Mackinaw!" exclaimed Jimmie. "Don't you know where you got the coat? You surely must know where you got it!"

"I got it out of the bag!" was the answer.

"But who put it in the bag?" demanded Ben.

"Believe me," replied the Englishman, "I never saw the blawsted thing before this minute! It's the most unaccountable thing, don't you know!"

"Go on!" advised Jimmie. "Go on digging into the bag and see what else you find. You might find a bushel of pearls!"

While the Englishman continued his investigation of the bag, Jimmie nudged Ben in the side and whispered, pointing at the coat:

"That's just about the kind of a garment the doped man wore out of Colleton's room, isn't it?"

"You just wait a minute!" exclaimed Ben. "I want to know how that Englishman got hold of that coat!"

The next moment the boys' amazement changed to actual unbelief in the accuracy of their vision. DuBois drew from the bag a false beard, and a crumpled white dickey topped by a wing collar and a sporty red tie.

"Say!" Ben exclaimed. "You've got to tell us where you got that bag! We want to know where that coat, those whiskers, and that dickey came from!"

"That's what I want to know meself!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"That's your bag, isn't it?" demanded Carl.

"It's my bag, right enough, don't you know, but I never saw these things before! Some one must have stuffed them in!"

"Come on in here and tell us where you got the bag, and who packed it, and how many hands it has passed through since you owned it," suggested Ben, leading the way to Mr. Havens' tent.

With the sporty coat, the beard, and dickey lying

on the blanket at his side, Mr. Havens turned to Jimmie with a sly smile.

"Was it you," he asked, "who told us just how the villains in the Kuro case disposed of the disguise, or was it Ben?"

"You just wait," Jimmie exclaimed. "Let's find out about this hand-bag before we reach any conclusions."

"Well," the Englishman began, seeing that an explanation was expected, "I bought this hand-bag of a Pullman porter on a limited train which left Washington for San Fracisco three weeks ago. I lost me own bag with most of me toilet articles out of the window, and the porter sold me this for a sovereign. He didn't tell me that it had anything in it."

"Where'd the porter get it?" asked Jimmie.

"He didn't say, don't you know."

"Where was the train when you bought the bag?"

"Nearing the Pacific coast."

"I presume," Mr. Havens suggested, "that you occupied a stateroom on that Pullman train? You never traveled in the day-coach!"

"The stateroom in my car was occupied by a sick man!" was the reply.

Jimmie bounded into the air with a loud whoop.

"Talk about dream-books!" he cried. "I'm going to get out a new edition with my name on the

title page. This sick man didn't appear during the trip, did he?" he asked of the Englishman.

"He did not!" was the reply. "And no one on board the train saw him except the man who had charge of him."

Jimmie gave another whoop and sat down flat on the ground.

"And you lost your bag, and bought one of the porter, and he brought you this? That's all there is to it, is it?"

"What's the mystery about the garments in the bag?" asked the Englishman without answering the question.

"Look here," Ben explained, "if we should climb that peak to the east at sunrise to-morrow morning, and find Noah's ark resting there, with all the animals wearing white aprons and cooking breakfasts for each other, and Noah listening to a talking machine which was invented only last year, that wouldn't be any stranger than is the appearance of that coat, those whiskers, and the dickey in this camp!"

The Englishman eyed the boy as if rather inclined to doubt his sanity.

"I don't understand what you're talking about, don't you know," he said.

Before Ben could make any explanation, Carl, who had passed out of the tent to look after the

supper, came rushing in, declaring that a strange flying machine was hovering over the valley.

"She's headed toward the shelf where the signals were shown last night," the boy added, "and she's making signals of some kind herself!"

"Perhaps they've got Colleton up in the air!" grinned Jimmie.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RACE IN THE AIR.

"DON'T read any more chapters from your dream-book!" warned Ben. "We've materialized the coat, the whiskers, the dickey, the wing collar, the red tie, and the felt hat Colleton wore away from his office that day, and I think that's about enough!"

"Materialized 'em through three thousand miles of space, at that!" laughed Jimmie. "If we could materialize Colleton as easily, we might have a little time for hunting on this trip."

The aeroplane which had been reported by Carl was still quite a distance to the west. It carried a light which appeared not much larger than a good-sized planet from where the boys stood. The hum of the motors sounded faintly from the distance.

"It's pears to potatoes," exclaimed Carl, "that she's going up to that old camp!"

"If she does, she'll find a man drunk in the cavern, and that's all!"

"And a lot of whiskey and brandy!" suggested Jimmie.

The aeroplane moved slowly to the north and west, and presently the boys were able to see something more than the dancing light.

"She's going to the old camp all right!" Ben announced, after looking at the machine through his field-glass for some minutes. "At least, she is headed in that direction now."

"And why shouldn't she be going to the camp?" asked the Englishman.

"Because only two classes of people are now much interested in that locality!" cried Ben. "The class most interested is the criminal class. The other is the official class. I have a notion that the criminals are pretty well disposed of to-night," the boy continued, "and it isn't time for the officers to return. Besides," he went on, "they wouldn't be apt to return in an aeroplane."

"I'll tell you how we can soon find out all about it!" suggested Jimmie. "I know how we can find out all about that machine!"

"No, you don't," laughed Mr. Havens. "You don't get away in any machine to-night! It spells trouble when you get away after dark!"

"Je-rusalem!" exclaimed Jimmie, in a disgusted tone. "I might have known I'd need my knitting when I came out on this trip! If I listened to all the advice I get from you fellows, I'd sit down here

and knit myself a pair of socks, or a cream-colored necktie, just like a perfect little lady. What's the matter with a game of checkers? Wouldn't that be too exciting for you?" he added, with a grin.

"I don't think there's been any lack of excitement up to date," laughed Mr. Havens.

"Say," Ben exclaimed, directly, "we really ought to go and see what that Crooked Terry is doing. You know I set out once to get a duplicate copy of the map of this country which he is supposed to carry in his head."

"Is this a conspiracy to get away from camp again?" demanded the millionaire. "Do you want to leave me here alone all the time?"

"We'll leave Carl and Mr. Claude Mercer Du-Bois to keep you company," suggested Jimmie.

"If you don't mind," the Englishman cut in, "I'd like to have me dinner now, don't you know."

"I'll bet it's all scorched to coals!" cried Carl, rushing to the fire.

In a moment he called back that the ham and eggs and coffee were just as they should be, and the Englishman was soon eating heartily.

The strange aeroplane was still in sight. In fact a great deal closer than when it had first been discovered. It was now over the center of the valley, still pointing toward the shelf from which the signals had been given the night before.

While the boys watched and waited, undecided as

to the correct course to pursue, the machine passed over the snow-tipped summit and disappeared.

"Some aviator out for a view of the mountains, probably," Mr. Havens suggested. "He seems to be keeping on his way pretty well."

"I've got a hunch," Jimmie insisted, "that that aeroplane has something to do with this Kuro case!"

"Aw, cut out the dream-book!" advised Ben.

"Didn't my dreams come true?" demanded the boy.

"You'll have to show me!" declared Carl. "Don't you suppose there's more than one false beard, more than one sporty coat, and more than one dickey with wing collars and a red necktie in the world?"

Jimmie ran out to the *Louise,* showing by his manner that he considered the question too trivial to be answered.

"Come on, Ben," he called. "We'll go up high enough to see where that aeroplane went. If she's still on her way east, we'll come down and go to bed, like good little boys. If she's hovering around the other side of the summit, we'll catch the aviator and put him through the third degree. We'll have a good ride, anyway!"

No further objections were offered, and the *Louise* was soon in the air. The boys kept her down so that her lights could not be seen from the other

side of the ridge until they came to the vicinity of the gully, then they lifted suddenly and crossed the summit, shivering in the icy air of the mountain-top.

The aeroplane lay just below on the ledge which had been occupied by the *Louise* on the previous night.

Three lights were in sight. The lamp on the forward framework of the machine was burning brightly, and two men were walking along the ledge with electric searchlights in their hands. They did not appear to be surprised at the appearance of the *Louise.*

"I wonder what they've lost," said Jimmie, his teeth fairly chattering with the cold. "Suppose we go down and ask."

Ben circled the *Louise* into the warmer air of the valley on the other side of the summit, and then moved slowly to the west.

As he did so, the strange aeroplane leaped into the air and darted off to the south. She seemed to be a speedy machine, for she swept away from the *Louise* with wonderful ease.

"You just wait till I get turned around and get the motors on," Ben muttered, "and I'll show you that we can go some!"

The stranger was some distance in the lead before the *Louise* was well under way. After that it seemed to the boys that they gained, although very

slowly. The machines both kept as low down as possible and ran to the full power of their motors.

The rush of wind and the clatter of the motors effectually checked verbal communication, but Jimmie pointed significantly to the machine ahead and then nodded determinedly.

"Let her go," muttered Jimmie under his breath. "We had a race something like this in Old Mexico, and the other machine brought up in the Pacific ocean. That was a race that ought to have been written up!"

In the meantime, those watching from the camp saw the strange aeroplane dart swiftly over the ridge and head into the succession of valleys running to the west of the range. A few moments later she was followed by the *Louise*.

"I'd like to know what those crazy boys are doing!" exclaimed Mr. Havens, rather impatiently.

"They're trying to catch that machine!" laughed Carl.

"But why should they take the chance of an accident by running at such speed in the nighttime?" asked the millionaire. "There are holes in the air just as there are holes in the surface of the earth, and the first thing they know they'll drop down about a thousand feet and tip over! It's a risky proposition!"

"That's what it is!" returned Carl shaking his head gravely. "It's a risky proposition, and if you

say the word I'll jump on the *Ann* and go and tell them to come back!"

The aviator laughed at the innocent manner of the boy, and the Englishman regarded the two with a stare of wonder.

"I never saw anything like it, don't you know!" the latter said.

"You're likely to see something like it several times before you get out of the mountains!" laughed Carl. Say, Mr. Havens," the boy went on, "we don't want that strange machine to come here and beat us in a race, do we? I don't think the *Louise* is making much of a show, and so, if you don't mind, I'll take out the *Ann* and run 'em both down. It would be a lovely race!"

"I wouldn't mind going with the lad, don't you know!" exclaimed DuBois showing great excitement.

"If you do go," replied Mr. Havens, "you'll get fined a year's salary if you don't catch both machines!"

"Oh, I'll catch 'em all right!" Carl exclaimed. "The *Ann* can run around both those old ice wagons, and then have plenty of time to spare!"

"The *Ann* can beat any aeroplane that was ever built!" replied Mr. Havens. "She was built for a record-breaker."

To tell the truth, the aviator was not exactly pleased at the idea of remaining alone in the camp

while the two engaged in the race, but the sporting strain was strong in the man's blood, and he was proud of his matchless machine, so he consented, principally because he wanted the *Ann* to win in a race which promised to be a hot one!

"I wish the other machines would keep in sight so I could watch the struggle," he said as Carl sprang toward the *Ann*.

"Do you know," the Englishman observed, "I rather like the spirit of the lad!"

"He's all right," replied the millionaire. "But," he added, "I didn't think you had the courage to get into such a game."

"To tell you the truth," DuBois replied, "I was tolerably well frightened during my ride here, but I think I can now trust myself in any place that lad is willing to go."

Mr. Havens saw the *Ann* rise swiftly into the air; rise to a height which must have chilled the blood of those on board, and then flash off to the south. The two aeroplanes were still in view although their lights showed dimly.

From his posittion in the tent the aviator could not determine whether or not the *Louise* was gaining. He saw that the great light of the *Ann* was rapidly closing the gap between the nearest lamp and herself, and had no doubt of the outcome of the race.

While he gazed one of the lights ahead dropped. Without knowing which machine had fallen, he crept to a corner of the tent on his hands and knees and brought out a night glass.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END OF THE FLIGHT.

When the *Ann* rose above the valley Carl saw the *Louise* some distance to the south. The strange machine was still in the lead, but the boys appeared to be gaining on her. Both were going fast.

The sky was now tolerably clear, although a brisk wind driving in from the west was bringing fleecy clouds from the Pacific coast. There would be a moon sometime between midnight and morning, but the prospects were that there would be a bank of driving clouds stretched over the earth before she showed herself.

The Englishman, unfamiliar with aeroplaning, began asking questions of the boy as soon as they were in the air, but, as the racing of the motors and the rush of the air drowned his voice, he soon lapsed into silence and contented himself with such views of the distant summit as he could secure. Several times he flung out an arm—including the shining stars, the drifting clouds, the wide stretch

of mountain and valley in the sweep of it—and Carl understood that he was saying in the only language available there how much he loved the wild beauty and the majesty of it all.

After a time the strange aeroplane began to seek the higher levels. She climbed up, up, up until the summit showed white and sparkling under her flying planes.

Carl saw the *Louise* following the stranger into the snow zone and wondered at it. To the boy it seemed that the distance traveled upward might better be gained in level flight. Every unnecessary foot of altitude seemed to him to be a foot lost in the race.

"Ben doesn't have to follow the stranger in the air," he mused as he shot the *Ann* ahead on the same level he had been traveling. "All he has to do in order to overtake her is to keep her in sight and go faster than she does. He lost several yards by following her up to the summit."

After a time the stranger changed her tactics turning to the west and seeking the valley again. The *Louise* followed in her wake as before and seemed to be gaining. The *Ann* was traveling much faster than either of the others and would soon be within striking distance.

That was a mad race under the stars. The stranger seemed to develop new speed possibilities as she swept along. The *Louise* appeared to be

loosing ground. The *Ann* swept forward relentlessly and was soon close to the rear machine.

Then a remarkable thing happened. The aeroplane in advance dropped like a plummet. It seemed to Carl, watching her light eagerly from his seat on the *Ann,* that she ceased her forward motion and lost her buoyancy at the same moment. He could not, of course, see the bulk of the machine but he could see her light.

The light seemed to be down to the surface of the earth in a minute. The *Louise,* following on, dropped, too. To the watching boy the falling of the two aeroplanes seemed as if they had dropped over a precipice.

Although not a very old or experienced aviator, Carl sensed what had taken place. The machines had dropped into a hole in the air! As is well-known to those conversant with the navigation of the air, there are actually "holes" in the atmosphere—holes into which machines drop as they would drop into a pit on the surface of the earth. There are also cross currents which tug at the planes in a wholly unaccountable manner.

These holes in the air result, of course, from conditions of temperature. They are dreaded by all aviators, and one of the first things taught in schools of aviation is to keep such control of his machine as will enable him to handle her successfully when such pitfalls and cross currents are encountered.

Carl had learned this lesson well under the tuition of Mr. Havens, and his first act when the *Louise* fell was to shift the *Ann* far away to the north of the place of descent.

He dropped down, too, in a moment in order to see what had happened to the other machines. The stranger lay a wreck in a rocky valley below and the *Louise,* some distance in the rear, was fluttering down. It seemed to Carl that some of her guy wires had been broken during the strain of the fall, and that she was almost beyond control of his chum.

Circling about the wrecked machine and the one which appeared to be in danger of being wrecked, Carl dropped lower and lower until at last his light disclosed a level bank at the side of a stream where he believed a landing might be effected.

By this time the *Louise* lay on the ground. He could not tell whether she had fallen with a crash or had gradually settled down. However, her lights were still burning, and he could see one of the boys moving about. The lights of the other machine were out.

The *Ann* came very near tipping over into the stream as Carl landed and a growth of bushes at the water's edge scraped the ends of the planes cruelly as she settled down. Without stopping to inspect any damage that might have been done to the aeroplane, Carl dashed over to the *Louise.*

The boys were at that moment leaving their

machine, turning their footsteps in the direction of the stranger. It was quite dark in the valley, as the timber line extended far up on the easy slope, and the boys were using their electrics as they moved along.

"Are you boys all right?" asked Carl, as he came panting to their side. "I thought I heard one of you groaning!"

"We're all right!" exclaimed Jimmie. "The *Louise* strained her guy wires when we struck that hole in the air, but we managed to flutter down. Except for the broken guy wires the machine is as good as ever she was. We can fix the guy wires right here!"

"But the other machine fell!" Ben added. "When she went into the hole the driver wasn't attending to his business, so she twisted sideways and turned turtle a hundred feet from the ground. We're going over there now to see if the man is dead."

"This ends my after-dark journeys in the air!" declared Carl.

"There's no sense in it!" added Ben.

DuBois, the Englishman, now came stumbling through the darkness and paused in the circle of light made by the electrics. He was still shivering with cold, although the *Ann* had not mounted to a high level.

"What's the bloody trouble?" he asked.

"You're right about the trouble being a bloody one!" Jimmie replied. "The man we were chasing wrecked his machine."

DuBois looked the *Louise* over critically.

"This one fell, too, don't you know," he said.

"Oh, we always come down like that!" declared Jimmie.

The Englishman stood leaning against the *Louise* when the boys left for the wrecked machine. It was all new to him, but he seemed to be taking in the situation slowly.

When the boys reached the wreck the aviator who had driven the machine lay on the ground, a dozen or more feet away from the seat he had occupied. He appeared to be quite dead. The body had the appearance of having fallen free of the machine some distance up in the air and crushed down upon the soft grass of the valley.

Ben stooped over the still figure for a moment and then turned to his chums with a queer look on his face.

"Do you remember the heavy man in brown who stood in the corridor at the door of Colleton's room?" he asked.

"We certainly do!" answered Jimmie. "I've been thinking about that husky man in brown ever since Mr. Havens told us the story."

"What brings that to your mind now?" asked Carl.

"Look at this body!" answered Ben. "Look at the heavily-bearded face. Look at the brown suit. Look at the refined and yet business-like makeup of the man. Even in death he seems domineering and forceful."

"That man was no aviator!" Jimmie exclaimed.

"His handling of the machine showed that!" Carl put in.

"And do you think?" asked Jimmie in a moment, "that——"

The boy was interrupted by the sudden appearance of the Englishman, who came out of the darkness with his hands pushed far into his pockets and his teeth rattling with the cold. The boys stepped aside as he drew near the body on the ground and waited for him to speak.

"Don't you remember," Jimmie whispered to Ben, "that DuBois bought that hand-bag of a porter on the Pullman-car which carried a sick man in a private stateroom across the continent?"

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Carl.

"Wait a moment!" advised Jimmie. "Watch the Englishman's face to see if he recognizes the dead man."

"Is this another page out of your dream-book?" asked Carl.

"How do we know?" demanded Jimmie impatiently, "that DuBois didn't see a score of times

on that trip the man who occupied the stateroom with the man who was sick."

"Oh, I see!" Carl said. "You think this man lying here dead is the man who stood at the corridor door that day?"

"I didn't say so!" whispered Jimmie. "I said to watch for some sign of recognition in the Englishman's face."

The Englshman bent over the dead man, searching outline of face and figure under the dim light of the stars. The boys heard a little exclamation of impatience, and then DuBois motioned to Ben to advance his searchlight so as to bring the dead face under its rays.

Ben did so immediately and the Englishman stood for what seemed to be a long time looking downward with a puzzled face. He brought his hand to his brow several times as if seeking to urge his slow brain into action and finally turned away without saying a word.

"That was a bad fall!" Ben said, seeking to engage the Englishman in conversation. "We came near lying where he does this minute."

"A bad fall!" repeated the Englishman. "Do you know who the man is?"

"Never saw him before to-night!" replied Ben.

"You might look in his pockets, don't you know!" suggested DuBois.

"That's a good suggestion!" cried Jimmie who had been listening to the conversation. "I'll see what I can find right now, if you'll hold the light, Carl," he added.

Carl advanced with the light and a thorough search was made of the dead man's clothing. The pockets were entirely empty save for a watch, a pocket-knife, a fountain pen and a collapsible tube of adhesive material. The underclothing, shirt, collar and cuffs were new and bore no name or laundry mark. The collar of the coat bore the trade mark of a well-known firm of manufacturers dealing only in ready-to-wear clothing. On the inside of the right sleeve was the union label of the garment workers. The serial number of the label was blurred and could not be read.

Ben opened the watch case eagerly but found no initials on the inside. There was nothing whatever about the man to give information as to his name, occupation, or place of residence. That he had been a business man and not a professional aviator was clear to the boys but their information went no farther.

The Englishman stood by while the articles taken from the dead man accumulated on the grass but

said nothing. Now and then he stepped closer and looked down into the white face.

"Don't you know," he said presently, "I think I've seen that man before!"

Jimmie nudged Carl impulsively but said nothing.

"You might have seen him in Washington," suggested Ben.

"No," answered the Englishman. "The man is not associated in my mind with anything that took place in your capital city."

"On the boat coming over?" suggested Carl with a wink at Jimmie.

"No-o," hesitated the Englishman. "I can't associate that face with anything on board the steamer. It might have been on the train coming across the continent," he went on in a musing tone. "It might have been in the Pullman on the way over."

"If your recollection is so indistinct," Jimmie put in, "it must be because you didn't see much of him on the train. Perhaps he remained in his stateroom most of the time."

"That's clever of you, don't you know!" the Englishman drawled. "Your suggestion of the stateroom brings it all back. This dead man, don't you know, often passed in and out of the stateroom

door and we noticed his goings and comings because he never permitted any one to see inside the door, don't you know."

"Did the man lose anything on the train?" asked Jimmie.

"Yes, he told the porter he had lost his bag."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAN IN THE STATEROOM.

"DID he make much of a row about it?" asked Jimmie.

"No," was the answer, "because the porter convinced him that it had accidentally fallen from the vestibule during a short stop in one of the passes. The fellow seemed glad to know that it was gone!"

"How could it get lost from the vestibule?"

"The fellow admitted leaving it somewhere outside the stateroom after taking it to the toilet with him."

"Did it ever occur to you," asked Jimmie, "that you bought the hand-bag the porter stole from the man lying here dead?"

"That's a queer suggestion, don't you know!" said the Englishman.

"Well, how did the porter come to have the bag to sell if he hadn't picked it up somewhere on the train?"

"That's a clever question!" asserted the Englishman. "But look here," he went on, "why should

a man like this one have a false shirt front and a false beard in his luggage?"

"I think I could tell you why if I tried very hard," answered Jimmie, "but we'd better pass that up for the present."

"Yes," Ben said, "I think we'd better give this man decent burial, repair the *Louise* as far as possible, and start back to camp."

"I don't see how we're going to open a grave," Carl said.

"We can make a shallow one, I guess," Ben answered, "and then use plenty of stones for covering. Of course we'll notify the mounted police as soon as we get to a station, and they will undoubtedly take the body out. Somewhere, undoubtedly, this man had relatives and friends, and they ought to know the manner of his death."

It was not very difficult making a shallow grave in the soft soil, although the boys had no suitable tools to work with. When at last the body was wrapped in a canvas shroud, composed of material taken from the planes of the wrecked machine, and laid into the grave it was covered to a considerable height with heavy rocks taken from the slope.

This task completed, the boys took guy wires from the now useless aeroplane and repaired the breakage on the *Louise*. The tanks of the *Louise* being about half empty, the gasoline was drawn from the disabled motors of the wreck and added to the supply.

"It seems lonesome, don't you know," the Englishman said, as he took his seat on the *Ann*, "to go away and leave that poor fellow all alone in the valley, with no companionship save that of the stars and the wind!"

"It gives me a shiver to think of it!" declared Ben.

"Well," Jimmie said in a tone far more serious than was usual with the boy, "every step he has taken since his birth has tended to this place. A million years ago, it was decreed that he should lie here, and that's all there is of it!"

"Quite true, quite true!" agreed the Englishman.

"Aw, you can't make me believe a man's life is mapped out for him like that!" declared Carl. "I guess a fellow has some show!"

When the boys reached the camp the eastern sky was ruddy with the approach of sunrise, and Mr. Havens sat well wrapped in blankets before the fire. His face was pale and showed suffering.

"I thought you'd never come back!" he said. "I saw one of the machines drop, but I couldn't for the life of me tell which one it was."

"Two of them dropped," Ben explained, and in a short time the story of the adventures of the night was told.

"It seems wonderful," Mr. Havens said, "that we should drop into a region, almost by accident,

whither so many things connected with the Kuro case were tending. When the Englishman brought the bag, I thought that the most remarkable occurrence in the world. But now the man who stood in the corridor at Colleton's door seems to lie over yonder in the valley. It seems like a chapter out of a fairy book!"

"Why, it's all simple enough!" Jimmie argued. "In fact, it's the most commonplace thing in the world. This big man stripped Colleton of his disguise in the stateroom and put the articles into the bag, intending to throw it off the train the first time he got a chance. He set the bag out into the corridor or the vestibule so it would be handy when the right time came and the porter stole it."

"Is this a new edition of the dream-book?" asked Carl.

"Then DuBois lost his hand-bag, and asked the porter to provide him one. For all we know the man just killed may have stolen the Englishman's bag for his own use. Anyway the porter brought DuBois the bag he stole from the man who has just been killed."

"Go on!" advised Ben with a grin.

"The porter neglected to remove the contents of the bag, and so the articles used in the disguise of Colleton come into the possession of the purchaser. The Englishman sets out on a hunting trip in the Rocky mountains, strays away from his compan-

ions, and turns up at the smugglers' place with the bag in his hands."

"You're only relating the obvious now," Ben criticised.

"And then," Jimmie went on," the big man brings Colleton into some hiding-place in the mountains, using an aeroplane as a means of communication with the cities. His machine is spied by boys who think their own machines can go some and the race follows. The big man drops his aeroplane into a hole in the air and is killed. The Englishman who bought the stolen bag, recognizes him as the man in charge of the sick man in the stateroom. Now, if that isn't all perfectly simple, I don't know what is!"

"You take it for granted that Colleton is hidden in this vicinity, then?" asked Ben.

"If he wasn't, the big man wouldn't have shown up here!"

"When the big man came in and landed his aeroplane on the other side of the ridge," Ben suggested, "he brought two men with him. When we went up in the *Louise* we saw two men walking about the ledge with lanterns in their hands."

"One of them may be Colleton!" shouted Carl.

"I don't know about that," Jimmie went on, "but I'll tell you there's some connection between the bunch that stole Colleton and the bunch the Canadian officers arrested for smuggling whiskey

over the Canadian border. I don't believe the red and green signals we saw night before last were entirely for the benefit of the smugglers. I'll bet the big man who was killed because he didn't know how to bring a machine out of an air-hole knew the language of those red and green lights!"

Mr. Havens was assisted back to his tent, and the boys busied themselves getting breakfast. The Englishman wandered about the camp for a long time without speaking. It seemed to the boys that he was studying over the events of the night.

Jimmie even suggested to Carl that the Englishman might be searching his memory for some incident connected with the journey across the continent which would place him in the possession of additional information concerning the man who had been killed.

When breakfast was ready, the Englishman took his seat by the white cloth spread on the grass but ate sparingly.

"Have you lost your appetite?" asked Carl.

"That was quite a shock, don't you know!" was the answer.

"Are you sure the man we buried is the man who occupied the stateroom on the Pullman-car with the sick man?" asked Ben.

"Quite sure!" was the slow reply.

"Did you notice him talking with any one in the car?" asked Jimmie.

"Indeed he was quite intimate with one of the travelers," the Englishman replied. "They went to the smoking room together and played cards frequently. They were quite chummy, don't you know."

"Would you know this second man if you saw him again?"

"Why, of course," answered the Englishman. "This second man, Neil Howell, is the gentleman who formed the hunting party I joined at San Francisco. He was quite anxious for me to go with him, don't you know."

"When did you leave your party?" asked Ben.

"Early yesterday morning," was the reply. "I wandered about in the mountains until I came to the camp-fire where I was found."

"Could you make your way to your camp now?" asked Jimmie.

The Englishman shook his head.

"It is in some of the wrinkles of the mountains," he said, "but I couldn't even make up my mind which way to set out if I started to find it."

"Your sense of direction must be deficient!" suggested Carl.

"It must be!" was the answer. "You see," he went on, "I wandered around this way and that, so long that I couldn't tell whether my camp was east, west, north or south. During the last few hours of my wandering I was half dazed with hunger

and fatigue, so there is little hope of my being able to locate the camp of my friends."

"Well, we can find it all right!" Jimmie declared. "I can take you up in the machine after we get done breakfast, and after we get last night's kinks out of our systems, and we can find your camp if it's anywhere within a thousand miles."

The Englishman appeared thoughtful for some moments before making any reply. Jimmie nudged Carl and whispered:

"Look here, Cully, I don't believe he wants to find that camp again! I don't believe he wants to go back!"

"Yes," returned Carl, "the quiet, peaceful, uneventful life we are leading seems to appeal to him!"

"We may be able to find the camp," the Englishman said after a pause, "but really, you know," he went on, "I wouldn't want to take another ride in the air to-day!"

"Oh, we can go to-morrow just as well," laughed Jimmie.

After breakfast the boys advised the Englishman to spend most of the day in sleep. They had had another hard night, and were in need of rest themselves. It was a warm, sunny day, and the lads, well wrapped in blankets, slept until almost noon. After they awoke and prepared dinner, Mr. Havens

noticed Carl and Jimmie looking longingly in the direction of the machines.

"What's on now, boys?" he asked.

"I want to find the answers to two questions," Jimmie replied.

"Where are the answers?" asked the aviator.

"In the air," grinned the boy.

"What are the questions?" continued Mr. Havens.

"The first one is this: Who are the men the dead man brought in with him last night?"

"And the other one?"

"Where is the Englishman's camp?"

"Two very pertinent questions!" suggested Mr. Havens.

"There's another question," Jimmie continued, "that I want the answer to, but I don't see how I'm going to get it right away."

"Perhaps I can answer it!"

"I'll give you a try at it," Jimmie laughed.

"Well, what is it?"

"Did the Englishman accidentally lose his camp or did he lose it on purpose? Can you answer that question?"

"I've been watching the Englishman for some time," the aviator replied, "and I think I can give you the answer. He left it on purpose!"

"I noticed," Jimmie said, "that he didn't seem very anxious about my helping him find it!"

"Well, whether he wants to find it or not," Mr. Havens continued, "I must insist on you boys locating it!"

"You want to know about this man Neil Howell!" laughed Jimmie. "Perhaps you have a notion that by finding him we can get track of the dead man's associates. You want to know why he induced DuBois to make the mountain trip. In fact, there's a whole lot of things you want to know about Neil Howell."

"That's just the idea," Mr. Havens replied. "I'm certain that DuBois left the camp voluntarily. There might have been a quarrel, for all I know. I half believe, also," he continued, "that the Englishman knew what the bag contained when he left camp with it."

"I don't know about that," Jimmie replied, "but I do know that a man going out for a walk in the mountains wouldn't be apt to carry a hand-bag with him if he intended to return."

CHAPTER XVI.

STILL ANOTHER GUEST.

"You bet he wouldn't!" declared Carl, who had come into the tent during the progress of the conversation. "He'd be more apt to carry a gun! What did he want to lug his toilet articles away for?"

"Perhaps he wanted to get that bag out of camp!" suggested Jimmie.

"What's the answer to that?" asked Carl.

"Suppose this Neil Howell recognized that bag as one formerly owned by the man he played cards with?"

"That's another dream!" Carl laughed.

"Anyhow," Jimmie said, "I'm going up in the *Louise* and find that camp!"

"And I'm going with you," Carl grinned.

"Can't I go anywhere without one of you boys tagging along?" demanded Jimmie in mock anger.

"It's a shame for you to say such things!" declared Carl. "After the number of times we've saved your life!"

"All right!" laughed Jimmie. "Come along if you want to!"

"If I were you," Mr. Havens advised, "I wouldn't try to land near the camp if you succeed in locating it. The song of the motors can be heard a long way off, you know, and the campers will be sure to know that an aeroplane is in the vicinity."

"That's a good idea!" Carl agreed. "We ought to find the camp and sail over it, and around it, and then duck away as if we belong out on the Pacific coast somewhere. Then we can go back on foot, if it isn't too far away, and see what sort of a crowd the Englishman traveled with."

"That's my idea of the situation," Mr. Havens said.

"And we ought not to say anything to the Englishman about where we're going!" Jimmie suggested. "Because he'll be eager to know what we find out, and may decide not to remain with us at all after we discover why he left his companions."

"We don't know that he hasn't told the absolute truth about his departure from camp," Mr. Havens suggested, "but it will do no harm to work on the theory that a man merely in quest of mountain ad-

venture would not leave his camp carrying a hand-bag. As Carl says, he'd be more likely to carry a gun!"

Ben came into the tent and stood listening to the conversation. He agreed with the others that there was something queer about the Englishman's sudden appearance with the hand-bag, but said that the fellow had really possessed a gun when he reached the fire where he had been found.

"He told me," Ben went on, "that Crooked Terry had taken his gun and other articles, including his money, from his person."

"Why didn't you snatch Crooked Terry bald-headed and make him give 'em up?" asked Jimmie.

"Because DuBois didn't tell me about his being robbed until after we had left the crook asleep in the cavern. I think, by the way," Ben continued, "that I'd better go up to the smugglers' den to-day and see what I can learn regarding those two men."

"Is this a conspiracy to leave me all alone in the camp again?" asked Mr. Havens. "I'm getting about enough of solitude."

"Why, there's the Englishman," suggested Jimmie.

"Don't you ever think he won't want to go, too,"

Ben laughed. "He's the craziest man about flying machines I ever saw."

"But early this morning," Jimmie argued, "he said that he didn't care about going into the sky again to-day."

"Perhaps that's because you suggested hunting up his camp," laughed Ben. "Somehow he don't seem to want to find that camp."

"Suppose," suggested Mr. Havens, "you boys go in relays. Let Jimmie and Carl go and look up the camp first, and after they return Ben and Du-Bois can visit the smugglers' camp."

"That's all right," Ben exclaimed. "I'll remain here until Jimmie and Carl return, if they're not gone too long!"

"Did you see anything of intruders while we were gone?" asked Jimmie turning to Mr. Havens.

"Why," replied the aviator, "I did see a man looking toward the camp from the valley to the north, but no attempt to molest me was made."

"So that's why you don't want to be left alone!" laughed Jimmie. "You think perhaps those fellows are hanging around here yet!"

"They may be, at that!" Carl suggested.

"We have the faculty of getting into a storm

center," Jimmie complained. "We get a collection of humanity around every camp we make! If we should go and make a camp on top of the Woolworth building, in little old New York, people would be making a hop-skip-and-jump from the sidewalk and inviting themselves to dinner!"

"Well, go on out and stir up another mess of visitors," laughed Mr. Havens. "And when you find this camp," he added, "don't land anywhere near it and try to creep in on the campers. All you've got to do is to come back and tell us where it is!"

"All right!" laughed Jimmie. "I'll make a map of the country so any one can find it."

The two boys were soon away in the *Louise,* and then Ben and the Englishman went to Mr. Havens' tent to further talk over the situation. The millionaire was very much inclined to ask the Englishman just why he had left his camp, but finally decided not to do so.

DuBois was very thoughtful and not inclined to join in the conversation. More than once they saw him step to the flap of the tent and look out over the valley. On such occasions he seemed nervous and anxious.

"Are you expecting company?" Ben asked after one of these visits.

"I heard some talk about people watching the camp, don't you know," the Englishman replied, "and it rawther got on me mind!"

"There won't any one come here in the daytime," Ben urged.

"Did you see the faces of the men who came this morning?" asked the boy turning to Mr. Havens.

"I didn't say that I saw men," smiled the aviator. "I said that I thought I saw a man looking toward the camp.

"Did you see his face?" insisted the Englishman.

"I did not!" was the reply.

"Can you describe him in any way?"

"I'm afraid not!"

The Englishman walked to the flap of the tent again and looked out.

"For instance," he said looking back into the tent, "was the general appearance of the fellow anything like the general appearance of the man who is approaching the fire from the other side?"

The aviator gave a quick start of surprise and

Ben sprang to his feet and walked out to the fire, closely followed by the Englishman. The man approaching from the south was evidently not a mountaineer. He was remarkably well-dressed, although his garments showed contact with mountain thickets, and his walk was unsteady and like that of one unfamiliar with rough ground. He wore a derby hat, a silk tie, and a gold watch-chain traversed his vest from left to right. He was, in fact, about the cut of a man one would expect to meet in the business district of New York.

Instead of watching the visitor, Ben turned his eyes toward the Englishman, determined to see if any signs of recognition showed on the face of the latter. His first impression was that this man had in some way found his way there from the camp which the Englishman had deserted.

DuBois' face expressed only curiosity and surprise as the visitor came closer to the fire. Ben turned to the newcomer.

"Good-afternoon!" he said.

"Same to you!" replied the other. "You can't understand," he added with a faint smile, "how glad I am to see once more a face that reminds me of civilization."

"That's me!" laughed Ben winking at the Englishman.

"That's both of you, and the man in the tent, too!" laughed the other. "I've been wandering around this everlasting, eternal, Providence-forsaken valley for three or four days, living on ground squirrels and seeking to become intoxicated on river water."

"Did you lose your camp, too?" asked Ben with a chuckle.

"I never had any camp in this country!" was the reply. "I came in by way of Crow's Nest, with a pack of provisions on my back, looking for land worth squatting on. I ate my provisions the first week, lost my way the second, and traveled on my nerve the third."

"Did it make good going?" asked Ben with a grin.

"Fairly good!" was the reply. "You see," he went on, "I had a couple of automatic guns and plenty of cartridges, so I'd shoot red ground squirrels when ever I got hungry and build a fire in among the tall trees and cook 'em. Then I'd go to sleep by the fire and wake up that night, or the next morning, or the day after the next morning, or any

old time. And that's the kind of an existence I've been having."

"That's the wild, free life, all right!" Ben agreed.

"I've been chased by bears, and kept awake at night by lynxes, and wolverines, until it seems to me as if I had butted into the Central Park Zoo! And right this minute," he added, looking around the camp with wistful eyes, "I'm about as hungry as a human being can be and stand on his feet. I haven't had a drop of coffee for a month!"

"I was waiting for that!" Ben grinned as he moved toward the coffee-pot and provision box. "Everybody that comes here is hungry! I've got so I make a break for the coffee-pot and the grub the minute I see a stranger approaching."

"I'm glad you've got the habit," laughed the other. "I've butted into camps in this country before now where a man wasn't welcome to take a second breath out of the atmosphere!"

"Recently?" asked Ben.

"Why, only three or four days ago," the stranger answered, "I struck a camp where they had tons and tons of provisions, and they wouldn't give me the second meal! Yes, sir, they fired me out after

I'd had a few egg sandwiches and a cup of coffee substitute."

"How long ago was this?" asked Ben, glancing quietly at the Englishman.

"Three or four days ago!" was the answer. "I've been traveling nights to keep warm, and to keep out of the clutches of the wild animals, and sleeping days so long that I've lost all track of time. It may have been three days ago and it may have been four days ago."

"Can you give me the direction of this camp?" asked the Englishman. "I'd like to know something about the fellows there, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't know which way it is from here. I couldn't find it if I wanted to, and I'll give you a straight tip right now that I don't want to! Just for company's sake, understand, I tried to get a night's sleep within sight of their camp-fire. I rolled myself in a blanket and was just dreaming that I was eating a porterhouse steak at Sherry's, when the midnight concert at the camp began. I guess they were all good and drunk before morning."

"Do you know," began the Englishman, "that

I half believe that you found the camp I belonged in!"

"If you were in the camp when I tried to sleep near it," the stranger went on, "you probably got a good souse before morning."

The Englishman turned away to the tent, and Ben busied himself in preparing dinner for the stranger who gave his name as Martin Sprague.

"I see," Sprague went on, while the dinner cooked, "that you boys have a couple of fine flying machines. Was that your machine that lit out over the valley a short time ago? When I saw that machine, I said there must be a camp in this side of the valley, so I followed my nose and here I am."

After a time, Ben placed a substantial meal before Sprague and then, to an answer to a gesture from the Englishman, hastened back to the tent.

"Do you know," DuBois said, as the two stood together at the flap, "that fellow who just came in was with Neil Howell in San Francisco! I saw the two together there often. If he went to our camp, he found Neil Howell there, and he received no such treatment as he reports.

"Then you think the fellow's a fraud, do you?" asked Ben.

"I don't know about that!" the Englishman replied, "but I do know that he is trying to deceive you, and my private opinion is that he came to this camp for a purpose, and with the consent of Neil Howell."

CHAPTER XVII.

CARL GETS INTO TROUBLE.

THE sun shone warm on the planes of the *Louise* as Jimmie and Carl sailed over the broken country to the west of the camp. They passed a ridge so high that the timber line broke a couple of hundred feet below the summit, and then dropped, shivering, into a depression wider but not so green as the one in which their tents stood.

The boys were taking their time, and, in the low altitude of the valley, conversation was possible as they moved along, looking to right and left for some sign of a camp.

"The Englishman's friends ought not to be much farther away," suggested Carl, after an hour. "We are at least fifteen miles from our tents already."

"Yes," agreed Jimmie, "the ridge we crossed

takes up a good deal of room. If they are not in this wrinkle, they may be in the next one."

"Wrinkle is exactly the word," Carl grinned. "This country looks as if some one had taken a level plain and crowded it together until the surface broke into seams and crags. It makes me think of the undulating surface of an old boot!"

The boys traversed the valley from north to south but saw no indications of tents or camp-fires. The ridge to the west ran out at the north end of the valley, and the boys turned there, preferring not to ascend into the cold air again unless it became necessary.

The valley in which they now found themselves ran in a northeasterly direction and broke into a canyon at the end farthest to the east and north. The boys turned as they swung around the point of rock and whirled along the new depression. Presently Carl caught his chum by the arm and handed him the field-glass with which he had been looking over the country. Jimmie used the glass for a moment and then turned back to Carl with a pleased look on his freckled face.

"You know what that is, don't you?" he asked.

"Sure!" Carl answered.

"That's the north end of our own valley, we see," Jimmie went on, "and the shelf we have just come in sight of is the one from which the red and green signals were shown night before last."

"That's right!" grinned Carl.

"Then, don't you see," Jimmie went on, "the signals were made for the benefit of some one in this valley.'

"That's the idea!" Carl chuckled.

"Now, suppose we find the tent the Englishman left in this vicinity," the boy went on, "what would that mean?"

"It would suggest to me," Carl replied, "that the signals were made for the benefit of some one in that camp."

"Right-o!" replied Jimmie.

"But where is this blooming camp?" Carl asked.

"We'll find it here somewhere!" Jimmie answered, confidently.

Directly the boys came to a canyon which opened at the west of the valley and led to a grassy plateau higher up. At some distant time the place now occupied by the plateau had doubtless been an enlargement and extension of the canyon. However, as

the years passed, the rocks had crumbled under the action of water until the great dent had become filled.

One look to the left as the boys moved slowly past the mouth of the canyon was sufficient. A fire was blazing high in the center of the plateau and half a dozen tents were scattered about. On every side the walls of rock came down to the green grass which lay like a carpet over the floor of the plateau.

Here and there the boys saw dark openings in the walls, similar to the one they had observed at the smugglers' camp.

"Those old rocks," Jimmie commented, "are honeycombed with caves, and it's a hundred to one that those hunters are obliged to keep things moving nights in order to drive away wild animals."

"From all accounts," Carl agreed, "wild animals don't stand much show with that bunch!"

"Of course, they've seen us," Jimmie observed as the aeroplane shot by the canyon and the tents were no longer in sight. "If they're not asleep they know we're here. Now, what's the best thing to do?"

"Walk right along just like we never noticed them!" replied Carl.

"Perhaps," Jimmie suggested, "they're looking for an aeroplane to put in an appearance."

"Do you mean to say that they knew something of the machine that was wrecked over to the south last night?"

"That's what!" replied Jimmie.

"I don't believe it!" Carl answered. "That supposition connects the San Francisco hunters with the Kuro gang, and I can't believe that to be a fact!"

"How far do you suppose that canyon is from our camp?" asked Jimmie.

"Probably twenty miles!" suggested Carl.

"That's a good guess," Jimmie agreed. "Now, look here," he went on, "if you think I'm going back to camp and leave the machine and then hike twenty miles to investigate that camp, you've got another think coming!"

"That's what you promised to do!"

"Not on your life!" replied Jimmie. "That's what Havens told me to do! But then, you know," he added with a laugh, "Havens had no idea at the time he gave the advice that we'd find the camp so far away. He probably thought we'd run across

it within easy walking distance of our own tents. Isn't that the way you look at it?"

"Sure!" replied Carl, glad of any excuse for landing.

"Then, I'll tell you what we'll do!" Jimmie argued. "We'll fly straight over the ridge under which the camp nestles, slow down gradually, so our motors will sound like they were getting farther away every moment, and then land. We ought to be able to climb back to the top of the ridge in a few minutes and look down into the camp."

"Aw, what's the good of just looking down into it?" demanded Carl. "We ought to get near enough so we can see and hear what's going on!"

"I don't care how near we get to it!" grinned Jimmie.

The plan suggested by the boy, reckless as it was, was carried out. The *Louise* found a resting-place to the west of the ridge and the boys sat down to consider future movements.

"Honest, now," Jimmie said, looking up at the fairly easy slope which led to the summit lying between the aeroplane and the camp, "one of us ought to stay by the machine!"

"All right!" Carl agreed. "You remain here

and I'll hike down and see what I can find out. But, look here," the lad continued, "you mustn't go prowling around! You mustn't leave the machine! I may come back on the jump, and want to get into the air in about a quarter of a second!"

"Huh!" grinned Jimmie. "You went off and left the machine when you were on guard near the smugglers' camp. I wouldn't talk about prowling around, if I were you!"

"This is different!" urged Carl. "When I left the machine then I didn't know that there were a lot of mountain brigands ready to grab it."

"All right!" Jimmie acquiesced. "I'll stay here by the machine for an hour. If you don't come back by that time, I'll come after you."

"Yes, you'll come after me!" cried Carl. "You'd better stay where you are! How would you know where to look for me in that mess over on the other side?"

"If you don't come back in an hour," repeated Jimmie, "I'll come after you! In an hour it will be time to leave for home."

Carl went away up the slope, climbing swiftly, and soon disappeared from view. Jimmie threw himself down on the ground close to the framework

of the *Louise,* in a measure protected from view by the planes.

"Gee!" mused the boy. "It's lonesome, waiting like this. Next time we go out on a scouting expedition, we'll bring some one along to stand guard. This waiting makes me tired."

But the period of waiting was destined to be a short one. Hardly had Carl disappeared over the summit of the ridge when three figures appeared there, sharply outlined against the sky. Jimmie crawled closer under the planes and lay perfectly still for some moments.

He saw the men pointing toward the aeroplane, heard them shouting to some one on the other side. Then they came on down the slope, half running, half sliding in their haste.

"Now, that's a nice thing!" the boy mused. "They are probably wise to what we were up to, and stood ready to make a run as soon as we landed. I wish I knew whether Carl butted into them or whether he got away,."

All doubt regarding the matter was settled the next moment, for Carl appeared on the summit, accompanied by three husky-looking men. The men beckoned to Jimmie and called out to those who

were running down the slope. It was clear that they were inviting him to remain where he was until the others came up.

Jimmie could not see the face of his chum, of course, the distance being too great. In fact, he only knew that it was Carl because of his being smaller than the others. He could, however, distinguish motions made by the boy, and these motions commanded him, as plainly as words could have done, to get the *Louise* away before the arrival of the men who were descending the slope.

Unwilling to leave his chum without knowing more of the situation, Jimmie hesitated. As he did so, he saw Carl drawn violently over the ridge. The last movement he saw was made by the boy's outstretched arms, commanding him to take the *Louise* into the air as soon as possible!

He hesitated no longer but sprang to the seat and set the motors in motion. The machine lifted clumsily, for the landing had not been a smooth one, but finally got her into the air, not more than a score of feet distant from the men who were rushing down upon her.

The boy anticipated a serious time in getting away, but, although the men below flourished re-

volvers threateningly, no bullets were fired. He brought the machine around to the east in a moment and swept over the heads of the men below. The group remained at the summit as he passed over, swinging down over the camp.

There was naturally great excitement below, and the boy would have enjoyed the situation immensely if he had been sure of the safety of his chum. The occupants of the camp rushed out of their tents and threw their hands and voices into the air as he moved along, only a few yards above their heads. Again weapons were displayed but no shots came.

The boy circled the camp twice, but was unable to catch sight of Carl. Realizing that the boy had undoubtedly been taken to one of the tents, he turned the machine down the gorge to the valley and swept straight on toward the shelf of rock from which the red and green signals bad been shown on the first night of their arrival in that vicinity.

By keeping to this route he was not obliged to ascend to the summit in order to leave the valley where the hunters' camp was situated. When he came closer to the shelf of rock where the signal

fire had burned, he saw three men standing in plain view.

"I reckon the whole population of British Columbia is centering in these hills," the boy mused. "There must have been a dozen or more people in the hunters' camp when I passed over it not long ago, and now here's three more probably belonging to the same crowd.

When the boy came within a few paces of the rock he whirled away to the south, not caring to seek a landing on the other side of the snowy ridge. As the machine lifted he saw two more men in the gorge or canyon which led from the summit down to the shelf.

"If the men who abducted Colleton and brought him into this country sought a location filled with peace and solitude, they will probably get out of it at the earliest moment," Jimmie mused.

As the boy turned on full speed in the direction of his camp he caught sight of an object which caused him to hesitate and then set out in a circling tour of the valley.

What he saw was the plane of a flying machine lifting above the top of the ridge to the east.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNALS.

WHEN Carl reached the top of the slope lying between the spot where the *Louise* had landed and the camp occupied by the hunters, he found himself confronted by two men who were climbing up from the tents below.

The men addressed him civilly, asking about the aeroplane which had just passed over the camp, and suggesting that the two boys join them at dinner. They were well-dressed, pleasant-appearing fellows, evidently products of city life.

"I don't think we can accept of your hospitality to-night," the boy answered, "because we can't both leave the machine at the same time. And besides," he went on, "it will soon be sundown, and we ought to be getting back to our friends."

"Why, we'll send a man over to watch the machine," one of the hunters argued. "Or, better

still," he continued, "you can bring the machine right into the camp. So far as I'm concerned, I wish your friends were with you. New faces are always welcome in a mountain camp."

Seeing how insistent the men were, Carl determined to bring the interview to a close immediately, and turned back up the westward slope which he had started to descend.

"Just thought we'd call for a minute," he said. "If you don't mind, we'll come over early in the day before long and have a good visit."

The two men who were now joined by a third followed the lad back to the summit arguing all the way that he ought not to take his departure so soon. When the *Louise* came into view they began beckoning and calling to Jimmie, as the reader already knows, and also shouting to those in the camp below.

"Tell your friend to come on up!" argued one of the men. "You may as well cross the ridge at this point as farther up. We'd like to have a look at your machine. Besides, you really must have a cup of coffee with us before you go away. We can't lose our guests so soon."

During this conversation the men had been beck-

oning to Jimmie, inviting him by gestures to bring his machine to camp. Seeing that the men were not inclined to let him depart at that time, the boy began signaling to Jimmie to get away in the *Louise* before the men got to her.

"Here, kid!" shouted the man who had been doing most of the talking, "don't do that. He'll think you want him to go away and leave you here."

"I want him to get the machine away all right!" Carl answered.

"You're an obstinate little rascal!" replied the man. "Here, Bob," he added, turning to one of the others, "take this kid down to the camp and keep him there until I return."

It was at this point that the men came chasing down the slope and Jimmie got away in the machine. Carl saw the aeroplane gliding over the camp with a great deal of satisfaction. He had been forced into one of the tents near the great fire, but could see the airship distinctly through the opening in front. Directly the man he had talked with on the summit entered the tent and sat down by the boy's side.

"My name is Frank Harris," he said abruptly, "what's yours?"

"Carl Nichols," the boy replied, with a grin which brought a smile to the other's face "What do you want to know that for?"

"Where are you from?" was the next question.

"The Big Puddle," replied Carl.

"Meaning New York?"

"Sure," answered Carl, "there's only one big puddle in the world."

"What became of the flying machine you boys were chasing the other night?" asked Harris after a moment's reflection.

"She dropped into a hole in the air and the aviator was killed," replied the boy gravely.

Harris sprang to his feet with a muffled oath and paced up and down in front of the tent for some time without speaking. When he returned to the boy's side his face wore an expression blended between suspicion and dismay. Carl remained silent until the man spoke again.

"Is that right?" Harris asked. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"Sure, I'm telling you the truth!" replied the boy. "The aviator fell into a hole in the air and

didn't know how to get out of it. We made a shallow grave and piled about a ton of rock on top of it. If you want to get the body we'll show you where it is any time."

"Do you know," Harris began rather angrily, "I hardly believe this story about the man falling into a hole in the air! Are you sure he didn't come to his death as the result of a conflict with some member of your party?"

"You don't think we murdered him, do you?" demanded Carl.

"Oh, I didn't say that!" Harris hastened to say. "I only want you to understand that the matter isn't yet settled in my mind. What about the machine which you say was wrecked?"

"So far as I know," answered the boy, "it still lies where it fell, and just as it fell, except that we removed some guy wires to strengthen our own machine. I don't think the motors can be used again. We used the canvas of the planes for a winding sheet, and brought away the gasoline."

"We'll get the poor fellow out to-morrow!" Harris promised, "and send the body east to his friends."

"You knew him, then?" asked Carl.

Harris hesitated, colored a trifle, and began a busy pacing of the ground in front of the tent again.

"I reckon he sees that he's made a mistake in claiming any knowledge of that fellow!" the boy mused with a quiet chuckle.

"What was it you asked?" inquired Harris, pausing in front of the tent. "Oh, I remember," he went on, "you wanted to know if we knew this aviator who was killed in the race with you."

"Why, yes," Carl replied. "You seemed to know where he lived and who his friends were. I thought perhaps you might know all about him."

"We know nothing whatever about him!" replied Harris, rather angrily. "He landed at our camp the day before the accident and visited with us a long time. He seemed to be a very pleasant and intelligent man. So far as his friends are concerned, we know nothing about them. When I remarked that we would forward the body, I did so under the supposition that papers in his possession would inform us as to his name and residence."

"I see," replied Carl with a knowing smile which the other was not slow in understanding. "How did you people come to know about the race?"

"Why, one of our men was up on the summit when the race began and saw the aeroplanes flying south. We know nothing further than that!"

"I'm sorry for what took place," Carl said, "but the man was sailing over our camp in a suspicious manner, and we thought we'd find out what he wanted. As a matter of fact, he needn't have run away when our machine took after him. There was no need of that."

The fact was, as the reader well understands, that the dead aviator had not been circling the boys' camp at all. The race, as Carl well knew, had started in the vicinity of the smugglers' cave where the *Louise* had taken up the chase. The boy made the above statement half expecting that Harris would contradict him, and so show some further knowledge of the race and the man who had been killed.

Harris looked suspiciously at the boy for a moment, half-opening his lips to speak, but finally decided to remain silent.

"There's another thing I want to ask you about," he went on after a moment. "You have a young Englishman named DuBois in your camp."

"How did you know that?" asked Carl.

"Why," was the rather embarrassed reply, "our boys are traveling over the country in search of game, and we naturally know what's going on around us! Besides, we know something about that Englishman. When he left us, we had a notion that he would go to some nearby camp."

"If he tells the truth," Carl replied, "our camp hadn't been pitched when he left yours."

"It is my impression," Harris answered, "that DuBois reached your camp on the evening of the day he left ours. Did he have a valuable looking burro with him when he came to you?"

"He was on foot," replied Carl, "and we saw nothing of anything like a burro. He appeared to be completely exhausted with walking."

"That was a bit of acting on his part! When he left us he took with him a burro worth at least two hundred dollars. Large sums of money also disappeared from the tents that same morning. The boys learned to-day that he was at your camp and they're going over to get him."

"Will they take him to prison?" asked Carl wonderingly.

"I'm afraid not!" was the significant reply.

"What then?"

"Justice is mighty slow and terribly uncertain in this country," Harris answered. "In fact," he continued, "there's only one judge who tries cases to the liking of the people."

"You mean Judge Lynch!" suggested Carl.

"That's his name," laughed Harris heartlessly.

"You don't mean to say that they'd lynch DuBois without giving him a hearing?" demanded the boy.

"I'm afraid they would!" was the reply.

"You don't approve of such outrages, do you?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then, why don't you send some one over to the camp to warn DuBois? Or send an officer who might take him to Field and turn him over to the law? That would be the right thing to do!"

"I've been thinking of doing that!" replied Harris. "I wish your friend had remained with the machine. Then we could have sent an officer over to-night."

"He might have remained if you people hadn't made such a rush for him!" laughed Carl. "You frightened him away."

"You're a pair of bright boys!" laughed Harris.

"I wish I could find a young fellow just like you to put into my Wall street office. If you showed the same courage and resourcefulness there that you do in the mountains, you'd be apt to make the money-kings sit up and take notice in a few years. Such young men are needed in New York!"

"I don't think I'd care to enter on a Wall street career," Carl replied, not at all deceived by the gilded bait so cunningly extended.

"Think it over," continued Harris. "You may change your mind after you leave the mountains. It's a fine opening for you!"

The lad promised to consider the proposition seriously, and Harris went away. He returned in a few moments with a bountiful supper, which he shared with the boy. All through the meal he continued his questions regarding the race, the Englishman, and the purpose of the boys in visiting that section of British Columbia.

Carl answered the questions truthfully whenever he could. He understood, however, that the attitude of the man who seemed to be so friendly was absolutely hostile. After supper Harris went away and Carl sat in the door of the tent watching for the return of the flying machine. He rather expected

that Jimmie would return with one of the boys in order to find out the exact situation.

The tent in which he had been placed faced the south and was directly in front of the fire. As darkness fell he saw members of the party gathering about the blaze with tin cans in their hands.

"Now," he mused, "I wonder what they're going to do. Looks like they might about to warm up lobster or canned roast beef for supper."

When it became quite dark in the valley the boy was amazed at seeing one of the men pour a powder from one of the cans into a long-handled shovel and drop it from there into the fire. The blaze flared up as red as a police danger-signal.

Carl came nearer to the flap of the tent and looked out to the north and east. Greatly to his astonishment he saw a green flame on the shelf of rock which cut the mountainside at the foot of the canyon in which lay the smugglers' cave.

When the red light in front of his tent died down it was succeeded by a green flame. A glance at the distant shelf at that instant revealed a red one. The boy drew back into the tent with a soft chuckle.

"I guess we didn't dope it out correctly when we figured that the signals on the shelf were not in-

tended entirely for whiskey smugglers," he said. "It seems to me that these hunters who talked about Wall street and money-kings are pretty thick with the outlaws!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A SURPRISE FOR JIMMIE.

When Jimmie saw the planes of the flying machine on the east side of the summit he dodged away in order that the aviator still below the line of the ridge might not catch sight of the *Louise* until he was himself well in the air. The boy wanted to know, before coming to close quarters, whether this machine was a new one in that vicinity, and whether the man in charge was in sympathy with those on the shelf below.

As soon as the aeroplane came into full view, however, the boy chuckled and swung close over. It was the *Bertha,* and Ben occupied the aviator's seat. Jimmie pointed toward the men on the shelf, asking mutely whether he ought to land, and Ben shook his head warningly.

Rather to the disappointment of Jimmie, Ben speeded the *Bertha* toward the valley instead of

circling the gully and the shelf where the men stood. However, he was somewhat mollified when he saw Ben seeking a landing-place. In a very short time the two machines lay side by side on the grass, and the boys were conferring together.

Twilight was falling fast, and the light of the fire on the shelf brought the scene there into distinct view. The boys were not so far away that they could not recognize one face and figure standing by the fire.

At first Jimmie could hardly believe that he saw aright, but in a moment his impression was confirmed by his chum.

"What's DuBois doing with those men?" Jimmie asked.

"He's trying to get away!" was the reply.

"Who are the men?" asked Jimmie.

"They're from Neil Howell's hunting camp."

"I thought so!" replied Jimmie. "But what do they want of DuBois?"

"They've got him under arrest!" replied Ben.

"That's a nice thing, too! What have they got him under arrest for?"

"They claim that he stole a horse or a mule or a burro and a lot of money from their tent."

"You don't believe it, do you?" asked Jimmie.

"I certainly do not!"

"What are they going to do with him?"

"They're going to take him back to their camp. One of the men said they'd probably lynch him when they got him there."

"Did they get him out of our camp?" asked the boy.

"No," answered Ben, "I'm the one that's to blame for his being in his present predicament. I set out in the *Bertha* to see what was going on at the smugglers' camp, and let him go with me. When we landed those fellows came rushing out with guns in their hands and grabbed the Englishman. I had a gun with me, but of course I couldn't do anything against three husky men like the hunters."

"And that leaves Mr. Havens alone, of course!" Jimmie said.

"He thought we'd better go before dark," Ben explained. "And now," he continued, "what have you done with Carl?"

Jimmie explained what had taken place at the hunters' camp, and the two boys looked into each

other's faces with no little anxiety showing in their eyes. Ben was first to speak.

"What did they geezle him for?" he asked.

"I couldn't imagine at the time," Jimmie answered, "but I think I see through the scheme now. When DuBois left their camp and came to ours they naturally understood that he would tell us all he knew about what was going on at the place he had just left."

"There wasn't much to tell," suggested Ben.

"We don't know whether there was or not!" answered Jimmie. "That Englishman hasn't told us all he knows about the doings there by any means! He probably knew about the signals. That is, if they had been in action on previous nights, and he probably knew whether the aviator who was killed had made any visits to the hunters. You probably noticed how thoughtful DuBois looked when we told him that the aviator was dead and that there were no identifying marks or papers about him."

"Of course I noticed that!" Ben said.

"I don't believe the Englishman told us half he knows about that bunch," Jimmie declared, "and

it's my private opinion that he never stole a thing at that camp! I guess when we know the truth about the matter, we'll find that he knows too much about those fellows, and that's why they want to get hold of him!"

"You still believe in the Englishman, do you?" laughed Ben.

"You bet I do!" answered Jimmie. "And I just believe they got him into the mountains because they suspected he knew what was going on in that Pullman stateroom. If you leave it to me, some of the hunters over there are mixed up in the abduction of Colleton!"

"That would be too good to be true!" exclaimed Ben.

"Why would it," demanded Jimmie.

"Because it's a long step in the game we're playing to find the men who actually took part in the plot against Colleton. If we have found them in that bunch over there, we've made mighty good progress!"

"Well, when it all comes out at the end," Jimmie insisted, "you'll find that some of those fellows are in the deal, all right! And you'll find that they got DuBois out into the mountains for the reasons I

have already given. They doubtless expected they could keep him with them until the whole thing blew over. But he ran away for some reasons of his own and they're afraid he'll talk!"

"You're the wise little Sherlocko!" laughed Ben.

Jimmie arose, seized his chum by the shoulders, whirled him around so that his face looked out toward the shelf of rock, and gave him a playful punch in the back.

"I'm the wise little Sherlocko, am I?" he demanded. "If you think I'm not right, just look there."

"What does it mean?" asked Ben as red and green signals alternated from the blaze at the foot of the gully.

"It means that the hunters who have grabbed DuBois are communicating with the same sort of signals we saw before with the men in Neil Howell's camp!"

"Perhaps they are explaining that they've captured DuBois."

"I don't care what they're explaining," Jimmie exclaimed impatiently. "What I'm trying to get through your thick head is the fact that they're

using the same kind of signals the smugglers used. They are also using the red and green fire the smugglers carried to their rendezvous."

"I understand!" Ben exclaimed. "That establishes the connection, all right! Now, what are we going to do about it?"

"You got DuBois into that mess," Jimmie grinned, "and it's up to you to get him out. It's a wonder they ever let you get away with your machine after grabbing him! They overlooked a bet, there."

"They didn't want me to get away with it," Ben answered modestly. "In fact," he continued, "they placed a man down there to see that I didn't get away with it. While they were busy putting DuBois through the third degree, I slipped down to the machine and caught the guard when he wasn't looking. Then I got away with the *Bertha.*"

"Caught him when he wasn't looking, did you?" chuckled Jimmie. "What did you do to him?"

"I bumped him on the coco with the butt of my automatic!" was the reply. "I guess probably he's laying on the ground there yet!"

"You're the wise little sleuth, too!" laughed

Jimmie. "And now," he continued, "have you any idea how were going to wedge our way into that mess of pirates and cut out DuBois?"

"I haven't an idea in my head!" answered Ben. "And I think we'd better go back to camp and talk to Mr. Havens about it. Probably he'll know what to do!"

"He ought to be consulted in the matter anyway," said Jimmie.

"Yes, and by the time we get done talking with Mr. Havens those outlaws will have DuBois halfway over to their camp," grumbled Ben.

"Well, you proposed talking with Mr. Havens yourself!"

"Yes, but I didn't think that time was an important element in this case just now. Do you think you can climb that slope and get up to the place where those fellows are without being seen?"

"We can climb the slope all right!" Jimmie answered.

"And we ought to do it without being seen," Ben went on, "because it's going to be darker than a stack of black cats."

"What'll we do when we get there?" asked Jimmie.

"We'll have to settle that question on the ground!" answered Ben.

"Look here!" cried Jimmie. "I've got a hunch!"

"What's the answer?" asked Ben.

"When we sneak up the slope, we'll make for the place where the whiskey is stored. If Crooked Terry is there at all he'll be drunk, and we'll talk immunity, and a lot of other stuff to him, until he thinks we're there to save him from a life sentence in the penitentiary. That will give us the run of the cavern, and we ought to be able to sneak out at some time during the night and get DuBois away."

"If they leave him there all night!" Ben replied.

"There's no danger of their making a hike to the hunters' camp in the darkness," Jimmie replied. "Those fellows are not mountain men, and they'd break their necks before they had gone halfway down the slope."

"I guess you're right," Ben answered, "and I don't think we'll have much trouble making a sneak into the cavern. The only thing about the plan that doesn't look good to me is the fact that we must leave our machines here alone in the valley. I don't like that!"

"Unless a grizzly bear or a wolverine should take a notion to go out on a midnight joy ride," Jimmie declared, "no one will disturb the machines. Of course it would be safer if we had some one here to watch them, but we haven't, and we've got to do the next best thing. However, I think they're safe enough."

Extinguishing all the lights and emptying the store boxes of automatics, cartridges, and searchlights, the boys pushed and pulled the machines into as secluded a place as they could find and started up the slope.

It was very dark and they dare not use their electrics, so they were obliged to proceed slowly until they came to the smooth ascent which led directly to the self. Then, altough the climbing was arduous, they proceeded more rapidly.

When they came close to the fire they saw three men standing by the blaze. DuBois was not there. The supposition, of course, was that they had stowed him away in some secure hole in the cavern from which it would not be possible for him to escape.

"It's dollars to dill pickles," whispered Jimmie as they softly skirted the fire and crept up the gully,

" that the Englishman has been left in the charge of that old crook. If that's the case, we ought to be able to get him without much trouble if we don't send an avalanche of stones down this gully before we get to the top."

The gully presented no avalanche of stones to send down. It was quite evident, even in the darkness, that the rough trail had been used enough recently to clear the way of anything which might go rolling and tumbling to the bottom. When the boys came to the mouth of the cavern they saw the crook sitting with his back against one of the walls, an automatic in his hand. He recognized them instantly as they came up, and seemed glad of their company.

It will be remembered that he had been promised immunity by Dick Sherman, the mounted policeman, and that the boys had been associated with the officers. In fact, the fellow cast an inquiring glance down the gully as the boys appeared as if he expected to see the officers following along behind them. It did not take the lads long to convince the half-drunken crook that he ought to produce the Englishman. Believing that any favors shown the boys would be appreciated by the man whom he ex-

pected to save him from a long imprisonment, Terry retired into the cavern and soon returned with DuBois.

"They'll crack me crust when they find he's gone!" Terry said as the boys and the Englishman started away together.

"Then perhaps you'd better come with us," suggested DuBois. "You'll be safer at the boys' camp than here, I'm sure!"

The crook agreed to this and the four got away without any difficulty whatever. In an hour they were at the camp.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET HIDING-PLACE.

When the two machines reached the camp they found Mr. Havens very anxious over the long delay.

"I thought I had lost you all this time!" the aviator said. "I had company for a time, but he's gone now."

"You came very near losing me, don't you know!" DuBois exclaimed.

"And I did lose Carl!" Jimmie confessed.

"And I came near losing the *Louise!*" Ben added.

"And Terry here," Jimmie cried pushing the crook forward, "lost his stock of wet goods when he left the cave!"

Terry, who had been very nervous during the ride through the air, and who now lay sprawled out on the ground as if he never intended to leave solid

earth again, gravely took two pint bottles filled with brandy from his pockets and set them out on the grass at his side. Then he rolled over and took a bottle of whiskey from another pocket. This he ranged with the others standing them all in a row so that the firelight gave their contents deep ruby tints.

"It's a cold day when I get left for a drink!" he exclaimed, with a cunning leer, as he pointed to the three bottles.

After the boys had related their adventures they proceeded to cook supper, and while this was being consumed they discussed the situation at the camp which DuBois had deserted.

"What's the idea of accusing you of stealing that burro?" asked Jimmie turning to the Englishman.

"That's a beastly shame, don't you know!" exclaimed DuBois.

"You didn't steal the burro, of course?" asked Mr. Havens.

"Look here!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Do I look like a person who would be apt to steal a mountain burro?"

"You certainly do not!" replied the aviator.

"Of course, it's a frame-up!" declared Jimmie.

"What's a frame-up?" asked DuBois innocently.

"When a man's jobbed," answered Jimmie, "they call it a frame-up!"

This explanation was no explanation at all to the Englishman, and so the boys explained that in their opinion, the hunters were, for reasons of their own, trying to send an innocent man to prison or cause him to be lynched. When at last DuBois understood he nodded his head vigorously.

"That's the idea, don't you know!" he said. "It's a frame-up, and they want to job me! I'll remember those terms, don't you know!"

"Why?" asked Mr. Havens. "Why should they want to job you?"

"They think I know too much!"

"If you do," cried Jimmie, "you haven't told it to us!"

"Besides," DuBois continued, "this Neil Howell caught sight of me bag one day, don't you know."

"Now, it's all as clear as mud!" cried Jimmie. "I know all about it now! You ran away to escape being robbed of the bag!"

"Something like that, don't you know!"

"I guess if you hadn't run away," Ben put in,

" you would have been dropped down a precipice some dark night!"

" Do you know," asked DuBois innocently, " that that is just the way I figured it out?"

" Well, you figured it out right," Mr. Havens answered.

" What will they be apt to do with Carl?" questioned Jimmie.

" They won't be apt to injure him," DuBois replied. " They'll get all the information they can from the lad and turn him loose just before they get ready to leave the country."

" You think they'll leave the country right away?" asked Mr. Havens.

" I think they will!" was the answer.

" You remember the sick man in the stateroom?" asked Jimmie.

" I never saw him, don't you know."

" You suspected there was something mysterious about the manner in which he was being carried across the continent, didn't you?"

" Indeed, I did!" was the reply.

" Did you know at that time, or have you learned since, that a post-office inspector named

Colleton had been abducted from the post-office building in Washington?" continued the boy.

"I read about it in the papers at San Francisco."

"Did you see in the newspapers in San Francisco a description of the younger man who stood in the corridor at the door of Colleton's room?"

"I think I did!" answered DuBois.

"When you found the sporty coat, the false beard, and the dickey with the wing collar and the red tie, and the hat in the valise you bought of the porter, did that remind you of anything?"

The Englishman nodded and waited eagerly for the boy to go on.

"You knew those things were in the valise you bought before you came to our camp, didn't you?" asked Ben.

"Indeed, I did," was the reply, "although I tried to make you boys believe that I had then discovered them for the first time."

"I understand," Jimmie said, "and I think," he went on, "that I understand your motive in telling that little white lie at that time. You wanted to see what effect the production of the articles would have on us, didn't you? You suspected that we

were here on some mission connected with the disappearance of Colleton, but you weren't sure!"

"That's exactly right, don't you know."

"And you knew that if we were on such a mission, the appearance of the articles in our camp would create a sensation!"

"Very cleverly stated, don't you know!"

"Isn't Jimmie the cute little Sherlocko, though?" asked Ben winking at Mr. Havens.

"I'm going to get that kid a job on the New York police force!" laughed the millionaire aviator.

"Don't you do it!" advised Ben. "Let the boy lead a respectable life as long as he can!"

"Before you came here," Jimmie asked turning to the Englishman, "you doubtless understood the motive of this man Howell in getting you away on the hunting trip. You understood that he wanted to keep you out of sight for a while?"

"Yes, I understood all that!"

"And now here's the big question!" grinned Jimmie. "As the attorney for the defense says in the criminal courts, I want you to consider well before you answer. Do you know whether Colleton was brought into this country or not?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, don't you know!"

"You believe with us that the man who was killed in the race was the man who left the post-office building with Colleton, and that Colleton was disguised in the articles you now have in your valise?"

"I think that's quite plain," answered the Englishman.

"But you don't know whether Colleton was left in San Francisco, or sent out on a voyage across the Pacific, or brought into British Columbia."

"There has never been a hint of Colleton in the camp, so far as I know. In fact," he went on, "the men in the camp, as a rule, are business men who know nothing about the abduction of Colleton or the motive of Howell in bringing me here. That is the reason why I say that your chum will not be injured in the camp."

"I'm glad to know that they're not all crooks!" Mr. Havens declared.

"At the time of the abduction of Colleton, don't you know," the Englishman went on, "according to the reports in the newspaper, several valuable documents were taken from his office."

"Some very important documents," Mr. Havens commented.

DuBois arose and walked swiftly to the tent to which he had been assigned. In a moment he reappeared with the bag in his hand. He took the articles it contained out one by one and laid them carefully on the grass. His own possessions made a small heap, but the sporty coat, the false beard, the hat, and the dickey with the wing collar and the red tie made quite a pile.

"Did we miss something on the first search?" asked Jimmie.

"You didn't make any search at all, don't you know," replied the Englishman. "You didn't look through the bag."

The articles being all removed, he opened the mouth of the bag to its full width and drew out a false bottom. Under the bottom lay several folded papers which he proceeded to remove one by one.

"I can smell iodoform now, can't you?" asked Jimmie.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded the Englishman.

"Didn't they use iodoform in the private stateroom where the sick man was?"

"How did you come to know that?" asked the Englishman.

"Smell of the papers!" advised Jimmie. "They used iodoform in the stateroom, and these papers were opened and examined there! Do you begin to see daylight?"

"Do you know why they used iodoform in the stateroom?" asked Mr. Havens. "Is it possible that they wounded Colleton and found the use of the drug necessary?"

"I don't know about that," DuBois answered, "but I do remember now that there was a smell of iodoform whenever the man in brown opened the stateroom door."

"Now, let's see the papers," Mr. Havens suggested.

Jimmie got one look at the documents as they were being passed to the aviator and jumped about four feet into the air!

"That's pretty poor, I guess!" he shouted.

"What is it?" asked Ben.

"Looks to me like the papers stolen from Colleton's office!"

The aviator took the papers into his hand and examined them intently for a moment. Then he turned to Jimmie with a smile.

"You're right!" he said. "These are the papers

described in my instructions! And they're all here—every one!"

"Look here!" chuckled Jimmie. "If some guy should come down to New York some day and steal the Singer building, and you should be sent out to find it, and should get into a submarine and dive down to the bottom of the China sea, you'd find the Singer building right there waiting for us to come and get it!"

"That's the kind of luck we've had in this case!" admitted Mr. Havens.

"Luck?" repeated Jimmie. "There ain't any luck about it! We've just loafed around camp, and taken joy-rides in flying machines, and the other fellows have brought all the goods to us."

"It strikes me," Mr. Havens suggested, "that we ought to get rid of Mr. DuBois and his hand-bag just about as soon as possible. I have no doubt that the fellows over in the other camp recognized the hand-bag lost by the man in brown."

"And that means that they'll nock DuBois' head off if they get a chance!" Jimmie cut in.

"It means that they'll murder every person in this camp," Mr. Havens continued, "rather than permit the papers in the bottom of that bag to get

back to Washington. Mr. DuBois ought not to remain here another hour!"

"What's the answer?" asked Jimmie.

"How far is it to the nearest railway point?" asked the aviator.

"Field is not more than a couple of hours' ride away," replied Ben.

"Let me take him there to-night and dump him on board a train for the east, bag and all!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"That's what I was about to suggest," Mr. Havens answered.

"But, look here!" interrupted the Englishman. "I'd rather stay and see the bloody game to the finish, don't you know!"

"I don't blame you for not wanting to run away," Ben declared.

"Think it over," the aviator suggested. "At least the bag and its contents must be taken out of the camp to-night. Mr. DuBois can go out with it if he wants to."

It was decided that the Englishman should accompany Ben out to Field and make up his mind on the journey whether he would return to the camp.

They started away immediately, Ben promising to be back before daylight. When he returned just before sunrise DuBois was with him and he bore an astonishing piece of information.

"Here's another extract from my dream-book!" exclaimed Jimmie.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOY AND THE BEAR.

Carl slept little that night. The man who had given his name as Frank Harris occupied the tent with him and the two talked until a very late hour. The boy saw from the first that his inquisitor was trying to obtain all the information in his possession regarding the purpose of the Flying Machine Boys in visiting British Columbia.

It is needless to say that no mention was made of the Colleton case. Carl knew that the fellow was talking round and round the subject, but he did not see fit to swallow the bait and mention the name of the abducted post-office inspector.

Harris talked a great deal about Wall street and the chances for young boys there, and repeatedly suggested that Carl and Jimmie join his office force. The boy understood what this all meant, and did

not "fall for the fly," as Jimmie might have expressed it.

"I'd like to know how I'm ever going to get back to our camp," Carl said, as Harris mentioned the possibility of his return the next day.

"Why," Harris replied, in apparent amazement at the remark, "one of your friends will come after you in a flying machine, I suppose!"

"I don't know whether they will or not!" answered Carl. "You fellows scared Jimmie away so he won't be likely to return right off."

"He needn't have been afraid," Harris laughed. "We wanted to entertain the two of you, and, besides, some of the fellows wanted to take a look at the machine!"

"And you wanted to know all about the Englishman, too, didn't you?" chuckled Carl.

"Oh, we'll capture the Englishman without much trouble," Harris replied. "As I told you before, we have men out after him."

"I should think you fellows would be afraid of the smugglers!" Carl suggested. "I've heard stories about smugglers being in this country!"

"What kind of smugglers?" asked Harris.

"Whiskey smugglers!"

"Oh, they're a cheap lot!" declared Harris. "They wouldn't dare molest a party of gentlemen out on a hunting trip!"

"Had you heard anything about smugglers being here?" asked Carl.

"Certainly not!" was the reply.

Carl chuckled to himself softly in the darkness of the tent. The red and green signals had, of course, informed him that this party of alleged gentlemen was holding communication with some one on the shelf which had been occupied by the smugglers, and also holding communication with the same signals which had been used from the smugglers' fire.

Naturally the boy was anxious for the safety of Mr. Havens, temporarily unable to defend himself in case of attack, and his chums. When daylight came he moved out of the tent hoping to be able to get away on foot without attracting attention.

In a moment he was undeceived as to this, for a burly fellow who was rebuilding the fire motioned him back to the tent with an oath. The attitude of the guard disclosed the hostility of the whole camp, notwithstanding the insincere conversation of Harris.

After breakfast Harris beckoned to the boy and the two proceeded up the plateau to the steep ascent which led to the summit of the ridge.

There Harris paused and drawing forth a field-glass looked intently in the direction of the shelf at the foot of the gully.

"Friends over there?" asked Carl knowing very well what the man was looking for.

"Why, some of our fellows who went out in search of the Englishman may have brought up over there!" Harris replied in a hesitating way.

"Can you see any of them?" asked the boy.

"I see people moving about on the ledge over there!"

"But you can't tell who they are?" asked Carl.

"Hardly," was the reply. "The distance is too great."

Harris leveled his glass at the distant ledge once more, and seeing him thus occupied the boy crept down the incline to the west of the slope, and disappeared in a narrow and rather dismal-looking opening in the cliff.

At first he passed only a yard or so into what appeared to be a rather deep cavern. He knew that his flight would be instantly discovered and had a

curiosity to know which direction the pursuit would take.

Directly he heard Harris calling out:

"Hello, kid!"

Carl crept farther into the crevice.

"There's no use in your hiding," Carl heard the man say. "Even if you should get away now, you'd starve to death in the hills!"

Directly Carl heard footsteps scrambling down the slope, and knew that Harris was not many feet away from his hiding-place.

Had he been armed the fellow's life might have been in danger at that time, but his automatic had been removed as soon as he had been taken to the tent. However, a small pocket electric searchlight had not been discovered when the careless search of his clothing had been made.

Harris came on grumbling and swearing, and the boy thought best to move farther back into the cavern. The chamber into which he made his way grew wider as he advanced. It seemed to be one of the caverns formed by the action of water washing out soft strata of rock.

Looking back he saw the figure of his pursuer darken the entrance, and so stumbled on blindly in

the darkness, his hands brushing against one side of the cavern as he advanced.

For all the boy knew there might be breaks in the fairly level floor of the cave. He well knew that subterranean streams often cut through the floors of such caverns. To fall into such a stream meant death, but he dare not expose even the tiny light of his electric, so he kept on in the darkness, feeling his way as best he could.

Directly he heard Harris calling from the entrance, using persuasive language at first, and declaring that the boy would be immediately returned to his own camp if he gave up his mad attempt to make his way back on foot. Carl crouched closer against the wall and remained silent. He knew from the sounds coming from the entrance that Harris was creeping into the cavern. He had just decided to press on farther in spite of the danger when a blood-curdling growl and a rattling of strong claws on rocks came to his ears.

Carl declares to this day that his hair rose so swiftly at the sound of that growl that half of it was pulled out by the roots!

He had no weapon with which to defend himself,

and to flash his light into the eyes of the brute would be to betray his presence to his pursuer.

Once possessed of the knowledge of his whereabouts, it would not be necessary for Harris to follow on into the cavern. He would only have to wait at the entrance for the boy to make his way out.

In a moment the boy realized that the bear was passing the spot where he stood. He could hardly believe his senses when he heard the clatter of claws on the floor and saw the black bulk of the animal obstructing the narrow shaft of light creeping in from the slope.

Before long he knew by the exclamations of alarm and the hasty pounding of feet that Harris was making his way out of the cavern. Remembering the long, narrow passage through which he had made his way before coming to the chamber, Carl followed the animal toward the entrance and, as soon as the sound of Harris' flight had vanished, turned on his light.

The bear was in the narrow passage. His great bulk almost shut out the daylight. He gave a great snarl as Carl approached from behind and turned his head to one side, but the passage was not wide

enough for him to turn around. He must either pass out and come in head first or back up to where the subterranean place widened.

For a time the bear seemed undecided as to what he ought to do. He growled fiercely at the boy, but could not reach him. He moved toward the slope occasionally, but always hesitated before pushing his nose into the daylight. From this the boy argued that Harris stood near the entrance, and the bear was afraid to attack him.

Carl took out his pocket-knife and stationed himself at the end of the narrow passage.

"He can't eat me with his hind legs!" he grinned, "and if he tries to back I'll give him a few slashes that will send him out into the open."

The bear tried to back and didn't like it. He rushed toward the entrance again snarling angrily, but, evidently sensing danger there, drew back once more.

"Drive the brute out, kid!" advised Harris from the outside.

"He'll bite you if I do!" chuckled Carl.

"No, he won't; I've got a gun ready for him!"

"You go on away," Carl suggested, "and I'll come out."

"The bear will escape if I go too far away."

"Aw, let him get away if he wants to!"

"And let you get away, too, I suppose?" suggested Harris.

"Why not?" asked Carl.

"Because we want information which we believe to be in your possession!" replied Harris.

"You pumped me dry last night!" insisted the boy.

"Come, hurry up," advised Harris. "Give the bear a couple of pokes and drive him out! I'll take care of him, and you, too," he added under his breath.

The last part of the sentence was not intended to be overheard by the boy, but his quick ears caught the words. He knew that the present situation could not long continue, but was hoping all the time that some one would come to his assistance.

Men from the camp below now began gathering about the entrance to the cavern, and many observations intended to be humorous were passed to and fro as they grouped about.

"Are you coming out?" demanded Harris directly.

"No," answered Carl.

"Then we'll come in and get you!

"The bear'll bite you if you come in here!" answered Carl.

The men stood talking outside for a long time. The bear did not back up against the boy again, and so received no more wounds. The beast was, however, evidently growing more savage every moment. It seemed to Carl that he must soon rush out of the cavern and attack the men in front.

After a long time a succession of whines came from the rear, and Carl knew that the crisis was at hand. It was plain now that he had entered a bear home which was abundantly supplied with babies.

When the cubs lifted their voices in protest against the absence of their mother, the animal in the narrow passage began to back again. The men outside apparently knew what was taking place, for the opening was darkened by a sturdy figure as the animal pressed back to where Carl stood. The boy hesitated for a long time trying to decide upon the best course to pursue.

He did not relish the idea of wounding the mother bear with his knife, but still less did he like the notion of himself being wounded by the sharp teeth and claws of the animal. He knew that if he could keep the bear in the narrow passage his pursuers could not enter, but at the same time he understood that this situation could not long endure.

"I wonder if the old lady would overlook me long enough to get to her babies if I should let her pass?" mused the boy.

The lad was not called upon to answer that ques-

tion, for while he hesitated a shout came from the outside, and the man who had been creeping in withdrew, his bulky body giving place to a slant of sunshine.

"They've got the machine!" he heard some one saying.

"I don't believe it!" another voice declared. "If you see a machine it isn't one of the three belonging to the boys."

"I don't know who it belongs to," the first speaker insisted, "but I know there's a machine coming this way from the shelf of rock!"

"Perhaps they have captured a machine and they are bringing that blasted Englishman over," still another voice cut in.

At that moment the desperate bear in the passage charged.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DOG IN THE CAVERN.

When Ben returned with DuBois Mr. Havens regarded the Englishman quizzically for a moment before speaking.

"I didn't expect you to return at this time," he said.

"I couldn't have kept him away with a cannon," Ben cut in. "You see," the boy continued, "when we got to Field, I had to get a whole lot of folks out of bed. The clatter of the motors had already awakened about half the town, and I had to wake up the rest."

"I don't see why!" said Mr. Havens.

"Well," Ben explained, "I had to wake up the express agent to get the hand-bag nailed up in a peach of a hard wood box, and locked up in his safe. Then I had to wake up a couple of men to induce the telegraph operator to come to his office. He said he wanted to sleep."

"Why didn't you let him sleep?" asked Mr. Havens.

"I did let him sleep, after I kicked his window in, until I got the two husky men from a miners' camp to pull him out of bed."

"You must have made quite a sensation in that little burg."

"Don't you know," cut in the Englishman, "I never felt so conspicuous in all me life."

"We were conspicuous, all right!" laughed Ben. "Well," he continued, "the operator bucked on working the wire after we got into the office, but after DuBois held a private conversation with him in the corner he set to work like he enjoyed being waked up nights."

"How much did you give him, Mr. DuBois?" asked Jimmie.

The Englishman made no reply, and Mr. Havens went on with his questions.

"Why did you want to get him to the telegraph office?"

"Well," began Ben, "you remember when we were talking about the disguise, the dickey, the sporty coat and false beard and all that? This little Jimmie had the nerve to say that the abductor buffaloed Colleton into opening the safe and taking out the papers."

"And I'll stick to that, too!" declared Jimmie.

"And the rascal said, too," Ben went on, "that when Colleton opened the safe, the brigand shut the discarded clothing into it!"

"And I'll stand by that, too!" declared Jimmie. "They searched the room, didn't they? They didn't find the articles of clothing, did they? Well, then, they must have been put in the safe!"

"That's a poor deduction!" declared Ben.

"Well, you go on and tell what you telegraphed to Washington about," Jimmie insisted. "Tell the truth, now!"

"I didn't say I telegraphed to Washington," Ben insisted.

"But you did, though, didn't you?"

"Look here," Ben exclaimed. "If you're going to tell this story, you just go right ahead and tell it. You're always butting in!"

"All right!" grinned Jimmie with a wink at Mr. Havens. "I can go ahead and tell it. I know what you telegraphed to Washington for, and I know what you found out!"

"Go on and tell it, then!"

"You telegraphed to Washington in Mr. Havens' name, and asked if there were any new developments in the Colleton case."

"That's right," admitted Ben.

"The people at Washington had to get some one out of bed, and the person they got out of bed had to find out whether you were alive or dead, and whether they had a right to tell you what you wanted to know, and unwind a lot of red tape, and then you got the information you sought!"

"What's the use of sparring for wind?" demanded Ben. "Why don't you go on and tell about it?"

"You just wait until I turn over another leaf of my dream-book and I'll tell you all about it. That is, I could tell you all about it if I wanted to, but I ain't going to."

Ben was shaking with laughter and the sober-faced Englishman was actually smiling.

"If I wanted to," continued Jimmie, "I could tell you that the man at Washington wired that the safe in Colleton's office had at last been opened by an expert. I could also tell you that he admitted that the coat and hat of the post-office inspector were found in the safe. I could also tell you that there began to be a faint suspicion in Washington that Colleton had walked out of his office with the man in brown and had been carried out of the city in the private stateroom of a Pullman-car. But look here," the boy continued with a very annoying grin, "you've been making so much fun of my dream-book lately that I'm not going to tell you a thing about it!"

"Is that the correct story, Mr. DuBois?" asked Havens.

"That comes very near to being the correct story, don't you know!" the Englishman replied.

"Is it?" demanded Jimmie, fairly dancing up and down.

"That's the story they told," Ben admitted.

"Say," Jimmie shouted, "when I get back to New York, I'm going to open an office for the purpose of disclosing the future, and I'm going to write a new dream-book, and guarantee all the dreams on an extra payment of five dollars per!"

"Look here, kid," demanded Ben, "how the dickens did you ever dream this all out?"

"No dream about it!" argued Jimmie. "Colleton had to get out of his room, and he couldn't go up through the ceiling or down through the floor. He had to pass out of the door. Anybody with the sense of geese ought to know that the two men seen in the corridor had just passed out of Colleton's room. It's the only solution there is to the mystery!"

"Oh, it all looks easy now as soon as we get as far as the hindsight!" said Ben.

"Well," Jimmie laughed, "I've done a lot of guessing in this case, and I'm glad I guessed one proposition correctly. I was just certain that Colleton's clothing would be found in the safe, but still I was a little leary when Ben came back with his story that he had been using the wire. You see, I understood without his saying so that he'd been talking with Washington."

"Well," Mr. Havens said after a moment's thought, "we've got the papers, and we've got the disguise, but we haven't got Colleton. In fact,

we're no nearer getting hold of him than we were the first day we took the case!"

"Don't you ever think that!" declared Jimmie. "We've connected Colleton with a number of people who might have had a hand in his abduction. If this work hasn't brought us to the man himself, it has put us in position to find out where he is."

"But the man who actually took the inspector from his office is dead!" Mr. Havens argued. "We can't bring the dead to life, and it may be that no other person on earth knew of the personality of the men back of the whole plot."

"What's the matter with this Neil Howell?" asked Jimmie.

"That is only a faint clue!" declared Mr. Havens.

"Anyway," insisted Jimmie, "we're on the right track, and I'm tickled to think that we struck British Columbia!"

"I wonder if Carl is?" asked Ben with a sudden drawing down of his face. "I hope the boy will soon show up!"

"They won't permit him to leave their camp, don't you know," the Englishman interposed, "until they find out more about the exact situation of affairs. The decent fellows in the camp won't stand for his being abused, but he won't be permitted to depart."

"Aw, what right have they got to go and tie a

chum of ours up?" demanded Jimmie. "They're a lot of fresh guys anyway, and they called me a lot of names just because they couldn't get their hands on the machine. I wish I'd 'a' had a hot water hose. I'd 'a' cooked their skins good and plenty! They're too fresh!"

"Second the motion!" cried Ben. "Why ain't we on our way to Carl instead of loafing before this fire?"

"We'll be on our way there quick enough if Carl doesn't show up pretty soon!" declared Jimmie.

Crooked Terry, who had been sleeping behind one of the tents, now came staggering up to the fire and stood weaving back and forth as if he had some unpleasant communication.

"Look here, you fellows," he said in a moment, speaking in the husky tone common to tipplers, "I forgot something! I've got to go back to the cavern!"

"You might have brought another bottle with you, then," laughed Jimmie.

Terry meandered deliberately to the rear of the tent and returned in a moment with two full bottles of liquor, which he held out to the boys with a sly wink.

"I don't want to go back after whiskey!" he said. "I'm stinting myself to a bottle a day for two days. I'm going to swear off! I never got into trouble when I was sober. The minute I get

drunk I go and do the very thing I ought not to do. Therefore, I'm going to swear off!"

"Going to keep sober, are you?" asked Jimmie.

"You know it!"

"I've got a picture of your keeping sober!" Ben laughed.

"You don't know what you've talking about, kid!" Terry continued. "It's easy enough to keep sober if you can get sober to start with. It won't be any trouble for me to keep on the water wagon after I get the booze out of my system!"

"You haven't told us what you've got to go back to the cavern for," Mr. Havens reminded him.

"Well," Terry began, dropping his glance to the ground, "the fact of the matter is that I left a—a—a—dog fastened up in a hole in the wall back there, and he'll starve to death if I don't go back."

"What'd you go and do that for?" demanded Jimmie. "Why didn't you let him out before you came away?"

"When we came away," Terry replied with a ferocious wink, "we wasn't thinking about dogs packed away in holes in the walls! I was fuller than a goat, anyway, and I wouldn't have thought of—of—this dog if I'd been walking away under a peaceful summer sky with no danger in sight."

"Perhaps the fellows we left on the shelf will find the dog and feed him," suggested Mr. Havens.

"No, they won't find him!" declared Terry.

"When I hide a dog, they don't everybody come along and find him!"

"If you fellows'll fix up a nice breakfast for the dog and take me up in the machine, I'll go and feed him!"

"What should you say this imprisoned animal would like for breakfast?" asked Jimmie.

"Well," Terry went on with another elaborate wink, "I have an idea this dog would like some broiled ham, and some fried eggs, and some German potatoes, and some bread and butter, and a quart or two of coffee. You see," he went on, "this dog didn't have any supper last night, on account of my getting a skate on, and he hasn't had any breakfast this morning because I eloped from the whiskey den last night, and he'll be pretty hungry."

Jimmie caught the crook by the arm and led him away to the other side of the fire, winking in the direction of the others as he did so.

"Tell it to me!" the boy said.

"All right!" Terry remarked. "Tell me what to tell to you!"

"Tell me who's hidden in the cavern!"

"There's a dog hidden in the cavern.

"Only a dog?" demanded the boy.

"A dog," repeated Terry. "I said a dog!"

"If we go with you with the breakfast in the machine," Jimmie asked, "will you tell us all about

how the dog came to be hidden in the cavern and who helped hide him there?"

"It ain't no secret about hiding the dog!" replied Terry.

"Just the same," Jimmie replied, "I've got a hunch that no dog is due for such a breakfast as you've ordered."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ARRESTS ARE MADE.

THERE was a tremendous din in the cavern as the bear shot out of the opening. The wailing of the cubs at the rear, the volley of rifle shots at the front, and the smell of powder smoke confused Carl for a moment. Then he crept forward to the entrance, almost entirely concealed by the smoke, and looked out into the brilliant sunlight.

The bear lay dead on the slope, but the men gathered about her were not congratulating themselves on their victory, or, in fact, paying any attention to the vanquished enemy. Their eyes were fixed on an aeroplane which was speeding in from the west, evidently heading for the summit just above the camp.

"That's not one of the machines belonging to the boys," Carl heard some one say.

"I thought," another man complained, "that we were getting out of the zone of civilization when we struck British Columbia."

"I thought so, too," another voice said, "but

we're running up against impertinent Britishers, and flying machines, and many other nuisances which belong entirely on the paved streets and in the air above the town."

The machine was now so close to the group, and also to the entrance to the cavern, that the rattle of the motors well-nigh drowned the sound of conversation. Still, directly, Carl heard some one shout that there were three men on the machine, and that one of them was Dick Sherman, the chief of the mounted police of that district.

The boy uttered a sigh of relief and moved out of the cavern to be greeted with shouts of laughter and many alleged jokes.

"How do you like living with the bears?" one of the hunters demanded.

"Bears are all right!" replied Carl. "There're about a dozen baby bears in there! They seem to be cute little fellows, with good voices."

"What do you say, boys; say we all take a baby bear home with us!" asked one of the hunters.

The question was greeted with applause, and half a dozen men immediately made a dash for the cavern. Before long two came out carrying cubs, probably from four to eight weeks of age.

"Where are the others?" asked Carl. "Why didn't you all get one?"

"There were only two!" was the answer.

"Only two!" repeated Carl. "They made noise

enough for two hundred! I thought all the forty bears who came out of the wilderness and devoured the two children were on deck!"

"I guess you're mixed in your Sunday school lesson!" one of the men remarked.

"Perhaps," Carl admitted. "It might have been two bears and forty children. I don't know. What I intended to convey was the idea that there was noise enough in there to represent a thousand bear cubs."

The aeroplane, sailing very low, now passed almost through the group of men, and Dick Sherman waved a hand in greeting at the boy.

"Do you know him?" asked one of the hunters turning to Carl.

"Sure I know him!" answered Carl. "I got him a supper down at our camp which put two inches of fat on his ribs."

"Then if you know him well," the hunter went on, "tell him, for the love of Mike, to quit nosing around our camp looking for some criminal who is probably in Washington, D. C."

"Has he been watching your camp?" asked Carl in wonder.

"He certainly has!" was the reply. "He's been nosing about here, at times, "ever since we came in! What do you think he wants now?"

"I think he came after me!" replied Carl.

The aeroplane was now seen to land on the level

space between the tents on the plateau, and Sherman and his two companions left their seats and approached a group of men standing by the fire.

One of the men, Carl saw, was Neil Howell, and the other was the burly fellow who had ordered him into his tent that morning. At that time the boy did not know Howell by sight, although he had often heard his name spoken there. It was only after a time that he learned who the second man was. Before the boy and those with him reached the tents, they saw a gleam of steel and the suddenness with which handcuffs were clasped on the wrists of Howell and his burly companion almost took their breath away. The men gazed at each other inquiringly.

"Do you know what it means?" one of them asked Carl.

"I haven't the least idea!" was the answer.

"Why, that's Neil Howell, the noted Wall street operator! I don't understand what he's placed under arrest for!" one of the men declared.

"I presume Dick Sherman knows what he's doing!" Carl suggested.

"I don't doubt that!" the man replied.

The three officers were now walking swiftly about the camp in opposite directions, evidently searching for some one not in view. A hunter standing by the boy's side glanced his eye over the group.

"It must be Frank Harris they want," he said. "He's the only one that isn't here."

"Frank Harris went down the slope to the west not long ago!" another said. "I guess he's looking for another bear cub."

But if Frank Harris was indeed looking for the third bear cub his search must have been a long one, for neither then nor at any other time did any member of the hunting party set eyes upon him again. Secret service men are looking for him to this day. How he got out of the wilderness no one knows, but get out he did, and out of the country, too, for that matter.

After concluding the search, Dick Sherman came to where Carl was standing by the machine.

"Where's that Englishman of yours?" he asked.

"Do you want the Englishman, too?" demanded the boy.

"Of course I want the Englishman!" replied the officer. "Do you think I'd be apt to find him over at your camp?"

"I haven't a doubt of it!" answered Carl. "Although I haven't been to the camp since yesterday. This man Howell and his chums were so stuck on my sweet society that they kept me here all night!"

"I'd keep you here about fifteen minutes if I had my way now!" Howell muttered.

"He thinks you sent out information which led

to his arrest!" commented one of the hunters. "He'll get even with you yet!"

"I didn't have any information to send out!" declared Carl.

"Then who did send it out?" shouted Howell.

"You can search me!" Carl replied.

Dick Sherman looked over to one of his deputies with a smile but said nothing. He merely ordered the two prisoners on to the machine and prepared to take to the air.

"I'll take these fellows over to your camp," he said to Carl, "and send one of the boys back after you and my deputies. They can come with one of your machines, and this one of mine, and bring the whole crowd at one trip."

"All right," laughed Carl, "I'll be mighty glad to get back to that good old camp again! You see," he explained, "when we get out on a trip of this kind, we usually pitch our tents and then go off and leave them. I haven't slept there one night since we built the first camp-fire!"

"How long will it take?" asked one of the hunters.

"Probably an hour each way," was the reply.

"Well, we'll see that the boy is taken good care of while you're gone!" the hunter said with a smile.

"And when you get settled down to conversation with this kid," suggested another hunter, "you just

ask him to tell the story about the two bear cubs in the cavern. He's a nervy little fellow!"

In something less than two hours, two machines came sailing over the valley, making for the plateau. When at last they landed, Carl was greatly surprised at seeing Mr. Havens seated on the *Ann.* Dick Sherman was riding his own machine.

"I thought you couldn't get out of bed!" shouted Carl to the millionaire.

"I'm fit to ride a thousand miles to-day," smiled the millionaire, "but I don't think I could walk ten feet to save my life!"

"When I got over to your camp," Dick Sherman explained, "I found Mr. Havens alone. He says you boys have left him alone every minute of the time since the camp was built."

"Not quite so bad as that," laughed the aviator.

"It's pretty near as bad as that," Carl admitted.

"When I got over to the camp," the official went on, "Mr. Havens told me that the others had gone to the smugglers' cavern. There's something queer going on over there," the official continued, "but Mr. Havens wouldn't tell me what it is. He said for me to tie my prisoners up good and safe and come along with him, if I wanted to find out what was doing."

"I hope you tied 'em up good and safe!" Carl suggested.

"They're safe enough!" replied Mr. Havens.

Carl now stepped into the *Ann* with Mr. Havens and the two, after bidding good-bye to the friendly hunters, shot away down the valley toward the smugglers' cavern, closely followed by the official machine and the three officers.

As soon as the machines departed the hunters set about breaking camp, as they had decided to leave that night.

"Ever since we've been here," one of them declared, "we've been heels over head in trouble. Who introduced us to this Neil Howell and Frank Harris, anyway?"

"I'll be blessed if I remember," another answered. "The first time I saw Harris he came to us in company with the Englishman and asked me to join in a hunting trip."

"By the way, where is the Englishman?" asked the other.

"That's one of the mysteries of the camp," the first speaker replied. "He disappeared most unexpectedly one morning and Howell and Harris both began calling him a thief and telling what he'd stolen."

"I heard that story about his stealing a burro and a lot of money," said the other, "but I never believed it."

"No one believes it!" was the reply and the hunters standing about quickly assented.

"And here's another thing I never understood

about this camp," another declared, " and that's the red and green signals we've seen in the fire nights. What did they mean? "

" Harris and Howell said they were sending beacons to a friendly camp across the valley," one of them answered, " but I never believed that. Who knows what Howell and Chubby were arrested for? "

No one knew at that time, and no one suspected, until they read the sensational stories of the Colleton case in the San Francisco newspapers.

At sundown the men had their mules brought in from pasture and given a feed of oats preparatory to the work of the next day.

They went to sleep with their belongings all made up into neat bundles, and by sunrise they were away, headed for the nearest town on the Canadian Pacific line.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

"You're sure that's a dog in the cavern?" demanded Ben as the three crossed the summit and entered the gully, after leaving their machine on the shelf to the east.

"Sure it's a dog in the cavern!" insisted Terry. "And look here," he went on, glancing keenly about, "there's two fellows hanging around here somewhere. They're the chaps who set me to watching the Englishman early last night. They claim to be connected with the business men who are hunting over on the other side of the valley, but I guess they are just plain mountain hoboes who have been hired to do the dirty work for the sportsmen."

"I don't see them anywhere around!" Ben suggested.

"I don't think they're here, don't you know!" DuBois put in, looking far down the gully. "You see," he continued, "the camp-fire has gone out, and there hasn't been any breakfast cooked here this morning."

"They probably made a sneak after you got away," Ben replied. "They knew they wouldn't get any money for what they did after that, so they probably took to their heels."

"They may be watching around, don't you know," the Englishman insisted. "I don't like the idea of hanging around here without knowing whether they are watching us from some of these bloody rocks."

The three hunted faithfully for a long time, notwithstanding the fact that Terry was constantly complaining that the dog would be almost starved to death. At last, however, they gave over the quest and moved on to the entrance to the cavern.

Just before they entered, Ben caught the Englishman by the shoulder and faced him around toward the valley.

"Look who's here!" he said.

What they both saw was the *Ann* and a strange aeroplane moving swiftly in their direction.

"I guess Mr. Havens is moving the whole camp over!" Ben suggested. "And I haven't got a word to say against it if he is! It's rotten the way we've left him alone."

"I think that's Mr. Havens in the *Ann!*" declared Jimmie handing the field-glass to Ben. "And I think that's Carl with him!"

Ben inspected the approaching flying machines through the glass and declared that Mr. Havens and

Carl were on board the *Ann,* and that Dick Sherman and two unknown men were on the strange machine.

"I'd like to know what they're coming here for!" Jimmie exclaimed. "Just as we get the thing all ready to make a home run, and get a hungry dog out of a hole in a wall, they come butting in to split the glory!"

"And the reward!" added Ben with a grin.

"I don't know where the machines can land, don't you know!" suggested DuBois.

The aviators, however, found landing-places. Mr. Havens lighting on the shelf where the fire had been, and Dick Sherman coming to earth close beside the machine Ben had brought.

In a short time the two parties met almost directly in front of the cavern. To the surprise of the other members of the party, Dick Sherman called the Englishman aside and spoke to him earnestly for a few moments. At the conclusion of the conversation, the Englishman's face fairly beamed with good nature.

"I'd like to know what's coming off here!" cried Jimmie.

"That's what I'd like to know," put in Terry tipsily. "Here we've got a perfectly good breakfast in this basket getting cold, and I don't know what that dog'll say when we give him a frosty meal! I wish now that I'd gone and fed him while you boys were hunting for those two outlaws you didn't find!"

"What do you think, Mr. DuBois," Carl broke in. "Dick Sherman arrested Neil Howell and Chubby over there at the hunters' camp and left them handcuffed and tied up in one of our tents."

"Yes, he was just telling me about that, don't you know," replied the Englishman.

"Well, how the old scratch did he get any information against them?" demanded Ben. "If he's got them under arrest for complicity in the abduction of inspector Colleton, why doesn't he say so?"

"Suppose they are implicated in the abduction case," demanded Carl, "how did Officer Sherman come to know anything about it? He hasn't been working on the case."

Ben broke into a shout of laughter, and Terry, who was beginning to think the breakfast never would be needed, turned hastily into the cavern.

"Look here," Ben said in a moment, "I didn't tell you boys everything that took place at Field last night. After I got done telegraphing, Mr. DuBois took the wire and held a long conversation with Officer Sherman. How he found Sherman I don't know, but the operator seemed to help a lot, after Mr. DuBois gave him a roll of bills that would choke a cow, and in the end they routed out the officer, and the arrest of Howell and Chubby is the result of that conference."

"Oh, come, don't you know!" pleaded the

Englishman. "I only told Mr. Sherman what I suspected. You see this man Howell appeared to recognize that bag, and his manner showed me that he was in cahoots with the man in brown who was killed in the race."

"Come on, come on!" yelled Terry. "I've got a patient in here starving to death!"

"We really ought to hurry," advised Ben. "I'm afraid we've been too full of our own schemes to appreciate the exact situation."

"Come along, then," advised Terry.

The whole party, save Mr. Havens, trooped into the cavern and turned to the left when they came to the rock which split the subterranean place into two chambers. Keeping straight on, illuminating the cavern with their searchlights as they went, they came to an opening in the south wall which had been temporarily barricaded with rocks and timbers.

When Ben held the searchlight to the small opening between the top timber and the roof of the chamber a pale and frightened face looked out.

"Hello, Colleton!" exclaimed Ben.

"Thank God!" was all the imprisoned man said.

In a short time the barricade was down and the inspector, safe and sound, was out in the open air, talking earnestly with Mr. Havens who, of course, had not entered the cavern.

"I never expected to see the light of day again!" the inspector said in a trembling voice.

"Now, don't begin to tell us the story of your life," warned old Terry, advancing with the basket of provisions. "You eat this good breakfast!"

"But, look here, Terry," Jimmie grinned. "You said you wanted that breakfast for a dog!"

"Sure!" exclaimed the old crook. "I forgot all about the dog!"

He raced back into the cavern and soon returned carrying a little puppy in his arms.

"He was asleep when you brought me out!" Colleton explained. "I forgot all about him. He's been a great deal of comfort to me!"

"Do you mean to say, Terry, that you ordered all that breakfast for that little puppy?" demanded Jimmie.

"Well," replied the old crook, "I really wanted the breakfast for the dog, but I didn't know but the man might eat part of it! You see," he continued, "I promised the outlaws that I wouldn't tell where this man," pointing to Colleton, "was, and I promised that I wouldn't lead any one to him, so I had to keep my word, don't you see?"

"But you did tell us where he was and you did lead us to him!" laughed Jimmie.

"No, I didn't," argued Terry, "I told you where there was a hungry little puppy, and I took you to where he was. Of course, if you discovered the man when we went to feed the puppy, I'm not to blame for that."

"You're an old fraud, Terry!" cried Jimmie.

"Yes, he's an old fraud," laughed Dick Sherman, "but I'm going to see that he gets out of this little scrape and leads a decent life. He'll be all right if he only quits the booze act."

"I've quit now!" insisted Terry. "I've limited myself to two pint bottles a day!"

"Well," Mr. Havens said, "so far as I can see, the case is closed. The man who abducted Colleton is dead. Two of the men who assisted in his abduction are under arrest, and the proof which points to the Kuro mail-order company as the principal in the crime is complete. All that remains for us to do is to see that the prisoners get to Washington and that the proof is placed before the grand jury. That will close the case so far as we are concerned."

"Then," said Jimmie with a sly grin, "I move we stay in the mountains a couple of weeks and have a little fun before we go to Washington."

"That would please me!" replied Dick Sherman, "but I've got to get busy getting this whiskey out, and looking up proof against the smugglers now under arrest."

All the others returned to the old camp, from which the prisoners were taken that night by the officer, and a great feast was spread in honor of the victory which had been gained.

The boys hunted game, fished in the clear moun-

tain streams, and sailed over valley and mountain in their aeroplanes for two glorious weeks and then returned to New York.

When they reached the big city, the Colleton case was entirely disposed of. Howell and Chubby had pleaded guilty and received long sentences, and the members of the fraudulent mail-order company had been convicted and sentenced to ten years each.

The large reward which had been offered for the discovery of Colleton and the arrest of the perpetrators of the outrage was paid to Mr. Havens, according to his previous bargain with the secret service department. In time, of course, the most of the cash found its way into the hands of the three boys.

When Colleton came to relate the story of his abduction it was discovered that Ben and Jimmie had actually reasoned out the events practically as they had taken place. The inspector had been drugged in his office by a cigar, disguised there, forced to open the safe and desk and bring out the papers, and had been taken across the continent in a Pullman stateroom as stated. He remembered little or nothing after opening the safe in his own office in Washington until he found himself in the smugglers' cavern, having been kept under the influence of opiates during all that time. To this day Colleton occasionally asks Jimmie if every one of the excerpts from his "dream-book" come true.

The Englishman remained for some months in New York, the guest of Mr. Havens at the hangar on Long Island, and on many occasions he was asked to tell the story of the mysterious hand-bag bought of the porter on the Pullman train, and to relate in full the adventures of the bag and its contents until the day the disguise and the documents it had contained landed a prominent and wealthy mail-order firm in the penitentiary, and Mr. Havens was often called upon to relate the events leading up to the Capture in the Air.

THE END.

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